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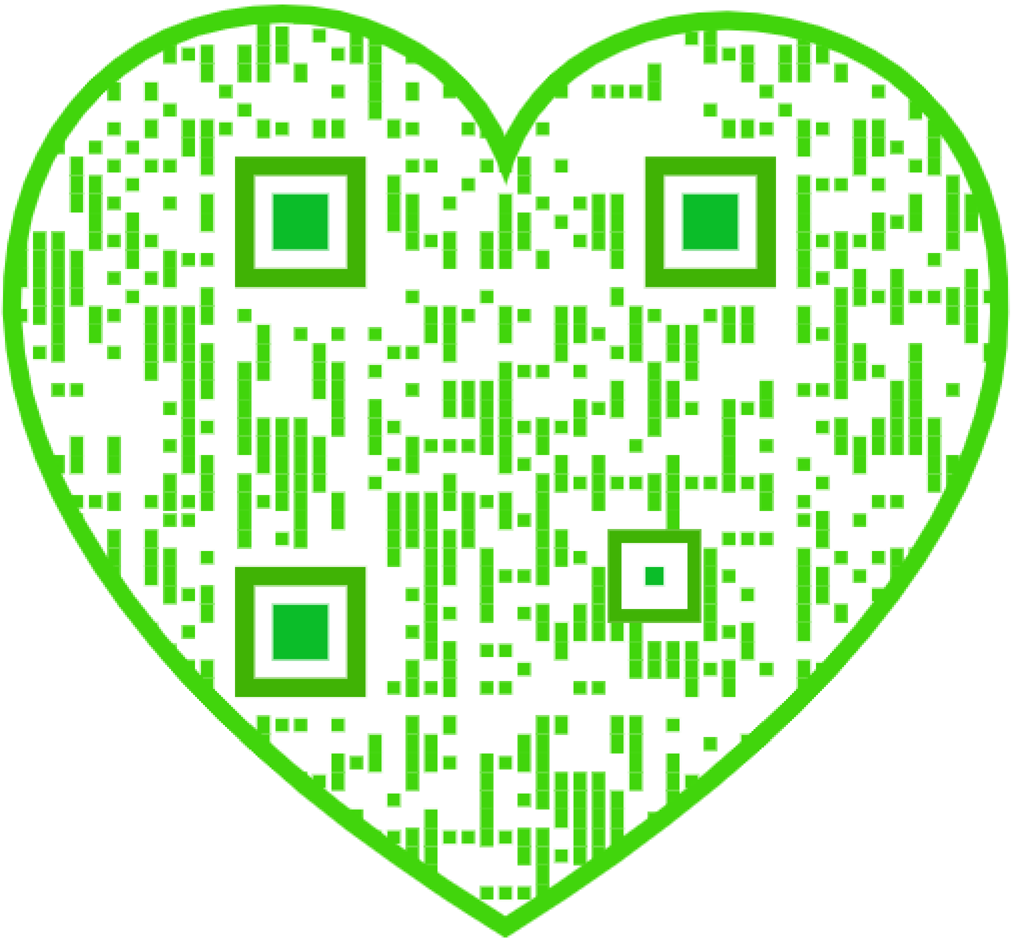

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COMMENT

THE UK NEEDS PROPERLY AFFORDABLE NEW CARS

It's official: just 10 pure-combustion superminis remain on sale in the UK (p10). What a fall from grace for a segment that used to dominate the top 10 sales charts month after month, year after year.

We have long heard why car makers have been forced towards this: tougher emission regulations bumping up the cost of small engines; lower profit margins on smaller cars; SUV demand; and the ZEV mandate and fleet CO_2 targets, which are pushing firms to ensure maximum profit on the combustion-engined cars they do sell.

What's the upshot? First, the shortage of affordable new cars – an essential means of transport for many – makes the socio-economic gap even wider. Second, if there's a problem now, it will be even bigger in 10 years when there are no longer any such cars on the used market.

What was once an entry-level £15k car is now an entry-level £20k car. And while the price of everything has gone up, the price of cars has gone up disproportionately.

A new wave of cheaper EVs is arriving and the long-heralded aim of battery-electric price parity with combustion engines moves ever nearer, but with less known about the longevity of EVs and their residual values, much more must be done to keep new cars, and therefore tomorrow's used cars, affordable.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Prior on Porsche

Has the latest round of Porsche 911 GT3 updates kept this sports car at the top of its game? Editor-at-large Matt Prior spills the beans.

Vodcast: GR Yaris vs Golf R

In the latest episode of the Autocar vodcast - Middle-Aged Tread - Matt and James chat about two top hot hatches.

Electric Mazda MX-5 driven

What's not to like? 160bhp and 229lb ft of instant electric torque in an original MX-5, complete with open diff and Eco tyres.

Autocar (ISSN 1355-8293 USPS 25-185) is published weekly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3SP, United Kingdom; haymarket.com; tel +44 (0)20 8267 5000

The US annual subscription price is $190.00. Airfreight and mailing in the US by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US postmaster: Send address changes to Autocar, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at the above address. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Autocar magazine is also published in Estonia, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Korea and Thailand.

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MERCEDES TO UNLEASH 21 NEW MODELS IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

Unprecedented overhaul of the firm's line-up will include new compact models, SUVs, exec cars, limos, potent AMGs and a supercar concept

Mercedes-Benz is gearing up for one of the most ambitious range expansion plans in its history when more than a dozen new models, a further eight facelifts and a pair of future-looking concepts will be launched in a crowded 24-month period.

The push comes as the German car maker seeks to bring stability to its global production and sales in key markets, including the UK, following a turbulent few years that have resulted in deliveries falling and profits dipping.

The new rollout is centred on the second phase of Mercedes' EQ electric strategy, which the company will pursue while also balancing the introduction of updated ICE models, including the launch of new-generation mild-hybrid and plug-in hybrid drivetrains.

2025 NEWCOMERS

Spearheading the new model blitz is the third-generation CLA saloon, which is the first in a series of six new compact models based on Mercedes' new Modular Mercedes Architecture (MMA) platform and will be unveiled next month.

Due in showrooms during the second half of this year, the electric CLA saloon is positioned as the most efficient EV that Mercedes has produced to date. With a focus on maximising range, the longest-legged version is claimed to achieve more than 460 miles on a single charge from a 85kWh nickel-manganese-cobalt (NMC) battery.

Six months after the EV,

> **"AMG sources have said a planned GLE range-topper could offer up to 600bhp"**

AC25 BSY
AUTOCAR IMAGE

a hybrid model will be launched, centred on a 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine with a small electric motor in the gearbox for up to 188bhp. Mercedes claims it will offer "diesel levels of efficiency".

Both versions will be badged as CLA saloons, making this the first model line to accommodate both EVs and ICE-based variants as Mercedes streamlines its model-naming strategy.

Not long after, the CLA Shooting Brake wagon will be revealed. It will make its debut in electric form but the petrol variant will follow in late 2025, sharing drivetrains with the CLA saloon.

Another major launch in 2025 will be the follow-up to Mercedes' first production EV, the EQC SUV. Its replacement will be an electric version of the second-generation GLC, which is set to headline Mercedes' display at the Munich motor in September.

The rival to the Audi Q6 E-tron, BMW iX3 and Porsche Macan will feature an 800V electric architecture underpinned by the MB:EA Medium platform shared with the 2026 electric C-Class. Single-motor, rear-wheel-drive and dual-motor, all-wheel-drive configurations will be offered. The electric GLC is due to be available with a choice of lithium-iron-phosphate and NMC batteries. These packs are understood to be good for ranges of around 400 and 500 miles respectively.

Secrecy surrounds the outputs of the new electric SUV, which will be produced at Mercedes' Tuscaloosa factory in the US. However, sources at AMG's Affalterbach headquarters have suggested to Autocar that a planned GLE 53 range-topping model could deliver up to 600bhp in combination with uniquely tuned motors and power electronics. This variant is pencilled in to arrive in 2026.

Before the end of 2025, ▸

New CLA saloon will be unveiled in March and uses the MMA platform

Electric and hybrid versions of the new C-Class are due in 2026

◂ Mercedes will reveal the new GLB. Described as a "massive step up" from the first-generation car, it will be the third model based on the MMA platform. As with the CLA, it will have both electric and petrol drivetrains, targeting the Audi Q3/Q4 and BMW X1/iX1. Both EV and ICE variants will wear the GLB badge, meaning the EQB moniker will disappear.

Test mules show that the new GLB will be slightly longer and wider than today's model, with more of a focus on interior space and storage. That change has been made possible by the switch to MMA from the older MFA platform.

The significance of the new GLB goes beyond simply replacing the first-generation model launched in 2019. It also serves as the template for Mercedes' 'Little G', which is due in 2027 (see box, right).

Potentially the biggest reveal of 2025 will be the Mercedes-AMG concept that is designed to "rewrite the term 'electric performance'". Expected to be unveiled in the middle of the year, this one-off supercar aims to demonstrate AMG's future electric performance capabilities, much like the EQXX did for mainstream Mercedes-Benz EVs.

"Where the EQXX aimed to go the furthest, this aims to go the fastest. It will be the fastest-accelerating car AMG has ever produced," a high-ranking insider told Autocar.

The supercar is said to be "not a million miles away" from the firm's striking One-Eleven concept revealed in 2023 and will showcase AMG's next-generation drivetrain technology, including an axial-flux electric motor developed by Mercedes-owned UK company Yasa. The same motor will also be used by the Mercedes-AMG GT SUV and electric version of the GT 4-Door Coupé.

Additionally, the concept will feature a next-generation battery, possibly a solid-state unit developed in collaboration with Mercedes-Benz's High Performance Powertrain division in Brixworth.

Meanwhile, the first deliveries of the ultra-exclusive Mercedes-AMG SL Maybach and SL PureSpeed are set to begin in the middle of 2025. At the same time, and emphasising AMG's motorsport ties, Mercedes-AMG will also unveil new GT2 F1 and GT3 F1 variants of the current GT.

2026 LAUNCHES

If 2025 sounds busy, 2026 is shaping up to be an even bigger year for Mercedes. It will start with the reveal of the facelifted S-Class, which will remain on sale until 2030 before the arrival of a significantly more advanced ICE successor.

The updated S-Class will have a refreshed front end featuring a larger, illuminated grille, along with redesigned lighting elements for a more modern look. Inside, the latest MBUX Superscreen, running new MB:OS software, will enhance the digital experience. The car will feature next-generation, level-three autonomous driving hardware. Under the bonnet, following the mid-2023 update to the six-cylinder engines, the facelift will bring a powertrain upgrade that will exceed 517bhp.

Shortly after, Mercedes will reveal a comprehensively re-engineered version of the EQS. As reported by Autocar, it will adopt the S-Class name. However, the ICE and EV variants won't share a platform. The ICE model will use a further developed version of today's MRA architecture and the EV will sit on the MB:EA Large platform.

As a result, the new electric S-Class will feature an 800V system. Combined with new power electronics and advanced inverters and electric motor technology, it promises significant improvements in drivetrain efficiency, range and charging speeds over today's EQS.

Mercedes' momentum in the EV market will continue with the launch

> **"The 2026 highlight will be AMG's first dedicated EV"**

Facelifted S-Class will gain a larger grille and a raft of advanced tech

TWO MORE NEW MERCS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Mercedes-Benz is also gearing up to unveil the new V-Class, the first commercial vehicle to be based on the VAN.EA platform. To be shown for the first time at the 2026 Beijing motor show, alongside the C-Class, it will sport a sleeker look than today's EQV, house a digital-focused cabin and offer more than 310 miles of range.

It will be previewed by the Vision V-Class concept, which will be shown at the Shanghai motor show in April. Sales are expected to begin in the second half of 2026. A high-end Maybach variant will also be created for selected markets.

Meanwhile, Mercedes will introduce a limited-edition version of the G-Class later this year. Expected to feature the Agave Green paint scheme, exterior accents and chequered seat upholstery seen on the one-off built in 2023 as the 500,000th G-Class, the exclusive model will have a small production run and a premium price.

of the pivotal new electric C-Class, a direct rival to BMW's upcoming Neue Klasse-based i3 saloon. It will be the second model to use MB:EA Medium, after the electric GLC, with which it shares key components.

Set to be revealed at the 2026 Beijing motor show, it will be offered in single-motor, rear-wheel-drive and dual-motor, all-wheel-drive guises, including a planned 600bhp-plus range-topping C63 EQ. An estate version of the EV is not planned.

The launch of the electric C-Class will precede that of a heavily upgraded version of today's petrol, diesel and plug-in hybrid C-Class. Arriving in both saloon and estate bodystyles, it is scheduled to appear in the second half of 2026.

By then, Mercedes also expects to reveal further details of its junior G-Class. First confirmed for production by chairman Ola Källenius at the 2023 Munich motor show, it is currently in the early stages of development, with a launch tentatively planned for 2027.

Also during 2026, Mercedes will unveil facelifted versions of the EQS SUV, EQE saloon and EQE SUV – all three of which are planned to be upgraded with the same MB:EA Large platform as the S-Class EV. Launches are pencilled in for the end of 2026. Upgraded versions of the US-built GLE and GLS will arrive around the same time.

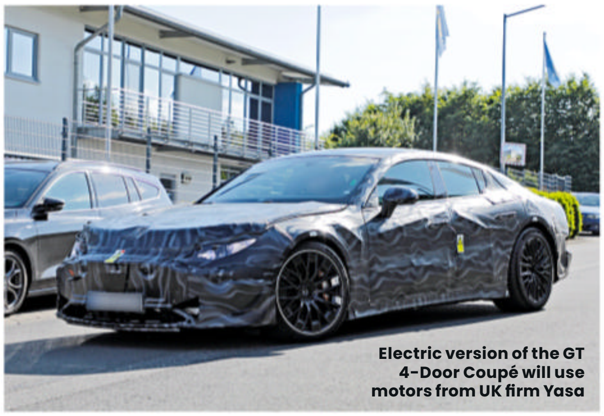
However, the big highlight of 2026 is set to be the unveiling of Mercedes-AMG's first dedicated electric model: a Lotus Emeya-rivalling saloon conceived as a sibling to the combustion-powered GT 4-Door Coupé.

The first car to be based on the AMG:EA electric platform, it will use Yasa motors that are claimed to develop up to 486bhp and 590lb ft and weigh just 24kg. The dual-motor launch model is expected to make as much as 972bhp and 1180lb ft. A Porsche Taycan Turbo GT-rivalling tri-motor variant, with one motor at the front and two at the rear, is also in development.

GREG KABLE

SPY SHOT

Prototypes of the new C-Class are now testing on public roads



Electric version of the GT 4-Door Coupé will use motors from UK firm Yasa

2027'S BIG STARS

Looking even further forward, Mercedes-Benz has already signalled plans to launch two major all-new models.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

One is the junior G-Class, or 'little G', which will be a smaller sibling to the legendary off-roader and sold exclusively with an electric drivetrain. It is intended to give Mercedes a foothold in the popular rugged crossover market.

Mercedes design chief Gorden Wagener previously told Autocar that the new model will take strong design cues from the "iconic DNA" of the existing G-Class. He said: "It will have its own character, but it will be a G."

A close sibling to the GLB, it will use the same MMA platform, also shared with the CLA. The junior G-Class is expected to be sold with single- and dual-motor set-ups and be positioned at the luxury end of the segment, but still offer off-road capabilities. A launch is tentatively planned for 2027.

SPY SHOT

The second major model will be the Mercedes-AMG GT SUV, the brand's answer to the Lotus Eletre and upcoming electric Porsche Cayenne.

Sitting on the AMG:EA platform, it will produce upwards of 1000bhp, making it one of the most powerful cars the brand has made. It will be positioned between the EQE SUV and EQS SUV in the line-up.

Prototypes have revealed that the 2027-bound GT SUV will sport a bold-looking design using elements that give a clear visual link to its saloon sibling.

BLACK BADGE SPECTRE TAKES ROLLS TO NEW HIGH

EV delivers new Rolls records of 650bhp, 793lb ft and 0-62mph in 4.1sec

The new Rolls-Royce Black Badge Spectre is the most powerful model in the West Sussex car maker's history, packing up to 650bhp and 793lb ft.

Its arrival also takes the Black Badge moniker into the electric age for the first time. Launched in 2016, Black Badge branding is intended to denote powerful and more individualistic versions of its most luxurious cars and is targeted at younger buyers.

Arriving just over a year after the Spectre went on sale as the brand's first electric car, the Black Badge model is pitched as a more aggressive proposition than the standard EV.

While the dual-motor Rolls-Royce Black Badge Spectre offers the same 577bhp as the standard car in normal running, a new Infinity mode unlocks a further 73bhp and quickens throttle response.

This performance-enhancing feature is said to be inspired by the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine that powered aircraft such as the Supermarine Spitfire during the Second World War. It allowed pilots to call on an extra burst of power to escape dogfights.

As well as the Infinity mode (the symbol of Black Badge), Rolls-Royce has added a launch control setting called Spirited mode, which boosts torque from 660lb ft to 793lb ft and primes the car for a 0-62mph time of 4.1sec.

In all, the potent new Spectre model surpasses the output of the 2016 Wraith Black Badge, which made 623bhp and 642lb ft from its twin-turbocharged V12.

In sync with the extra reserves of the Black Badge Spectre, engineers have fitted new dampers to reduce the effects of the three-tonne EV squatting under acceleration and diving under braking. They also increase the roll stabilisation for flatter cornering. The car gets heavier steering too.

Rolls-Royce has introduced new levels of customisation with the Black Badge Spectre. One option enables buyers to fit the illuminated grille with a backplate that lights up in one of five colours.

This theme continues inside, where the treadplate can also be illuminated, this time in 10 different colourways. The cabin houses the same luxuries as the standard car, which combines an array of high-end materials with digital screens and physical buttons.

The Black Badge is also available with a new colour: Vapour Violet. This is said to be inspired by the "neon ambience of 1980s and 1990s club culture". The new colour can be paired with a white bonnet for a "bold contrast". Special new 23in five-spoke alloy wheels are fitted and shod with Rolls-Royce's noise-cancelling run-flat tyres.

"Black Badge Spectre is one of the clearest statements of power and purpose we have ever made," said Rolls-Royce CEO Chris Brownridge. "Our engineers crafted an intense and uncompromising character and the most powerful Rolls-Royce in history."

The company has not disclosed pricing, but with the standard car costing from £332,055 before options, it is likely that transaction prices for the Black Badge Spectre will creep well beyond the £500,000 mark once cars are equipped to customers' specifications.

WILL RIMELL

Option of Vapour Violet paint is new, as are its unique 23in wheels

SPECTRE
ROLLS-ROYCE
GOODWOOD

Treadplate can be lit in any of 10 colours; grille offers lighting option too

Infinity symbol denotes Black Badge; cabin mixes trad with modern

OFFICIAL PICTURES

"A new Infinity mode unlocks a further 73bhp and quickens throttle response"

VW EYES REBORN SCOUT FOR ELECTRIC 4x4 TIE-UP

Ownership of Scout could enable VW to build a serious off-roading EV
AUTOCAR IMAGE
K EX 3825 E

VOLKSWAGEN COULD revive plans to launch a highly capable electric off-roader by using a new platform being developed by Scout Motors.

The American brand, inspired by the Scout range of Jeep-rivalling off-roaders made by International Harvester in the 1960s and 1970s, was launched by the Volkswagen Group in 2022 and is currently developing an SUV and a pick-up truck that will sit on a bespoke ladder-on-frame chassis.

Although wholly owned by Volkswagen USA, Scout Motors is an independent company and has been conceived to act as a fast-moving start-up with a heavy focus on advanced technology.

The Terra pick-up and Traveler SUV will both be offered with electric and range-extender powertrains and will benefit from software developed by Volkswagen's new joint venture with Rivian. The models will be built at a new US plant under construction in Georgia, and are due to be launched in around 2028.

The development of a bespoke ladder-on-frame chassis is necessary to give the Scout vehicles genuine Jeep Wrangler-rivalling off-road ability.

Scout technical boss Burkhard Huhnke told Autocar that the firm offered "a chance for the Volkswagen Group to observe how a start-up would take on these challenges".

He added: "There is no body-on-frame platform in the entire group, so someone has to start. There is no body like that, EV like that, chassis like that, so we have to start from scratch."

Asked how closely Wolfsburg is monitoring its investment, particularly in the ladder-on-frame chassis, Huhnke said: "You never get money for free."

Speaking about the challenge Scout faces, he said: "Efficiency is key. I've taken the challenge to become a benchmark R&D organisation in the world, from a size and cost perspective. That is an interesting challenge appreciated by our sponsors as well. Of course, we are under observation."

While Huhnke did not directly address the Volkswagen Group's interest in the ladder-on-frame chassis, sources suggest there is a desire to use it for further vehicles – although given the timelines for the Scout launch, any other models adopting the platform would not appear until at least the early 2030s.

In 2020, Autocar revealed plans by Volkswagen to launch a large electric off-roader. The vehicle, known internally as the ID Ruggdzz and set to use a variant of the MEB platform, would have served as a Defender-rivalling SUV. The model had been planned for a 2023 launch but was one of a number of models scrapped after a change in Volkswagen management. However, Autocar sources suggest Volkswagen is keen to revisit the concept of an electric off-roader, and the Scout chassis would be a natural fit.

Audi could also be interested in Scout's platform. As reported by Autocar in 2023, Audi is considering plans to launch its own 4x4 off-roader, with a model that could potentially be built alongside the two Scouts to make maximum use of the new plant's production capacity.

Scout boss Scott Keogh recently said the factory has been designed so it can produce models for other Volkswagen Group brands.

Huhnke: "Efficiency is key"

EV start-up is readying ladder-frame Terra and Traveler 4x4s

RENAULT IS STEERING ITS WAY TO NEW BY-WIRE TECH

Steer-by-wire will be developed on the Filante and put to focus groups

RENAULT IS CONSIDERING offering a steering yoke in future cars but will pursue the technology only once buyers have sufficient trust in its reliability.

Executives cite the extra packaging space created by steer-by-wire tech as a particular advantage, because it does not require the fitment of a traditional steering column.

The company will develop the system in its one-off Filante streamliner before putting it through focus group tests.

"It needs to be super-reassuring in terms of: is it still nice to drive and safe to drive," Renault design boss Gilles Vidal told Autocar. "That will be the first question. Once people are reassured, we [will] deliver even more, even better."

MAZDA 2 BECOMES LATEST VICTIM OF SUPERMINI CULL

Audi A1 also among latest class casualties, following Ford Fiesta's demise

There will soon be just 10 pure-petrol superminis left on sale in the UK, the Mazda 2 having been axed after a decade on sale and the Audi A1 being due to retire.

The 2 was launched in 2015 and was a steady seller in the UK, with facelifts in 2019 and 2023 helping to keep it competitive.

It is effectively replaced by the Mazda 2 Hybrid, a rebadged Toyota Yaris that was launched in 2023.

Yaris-based hybrid claimed 61% of all 2 sales last year

Mazda has declined to specify why it has taken the petrol 2 off sale, but the ongoing cull in the segment is a product of several factors that have hampered the business case for small cars.

The European Union's General Safety Regulations 2 (GSR2) is a key culprit. It requires various safety systems to be fitted for cars to remain on sale in Europe, and many based on older architectures, including the Renault Zoe electric supermini, couldn't be adapted to suit.

The cost of complying with GSR2 has eroded the already paper-thin profitability of many superminis. According to the European Association of Automotive Suppliers, the cost of integrating the necessary modifications can be as much as around £500 per car.

Volkswagen boss Thomas Schäfer told Autocar last year that GSR2 "adds cost tremendously", and is "the real complication" in the company continuing to sell the Polo.

Another culprit is the EU's new Euro 7 emissions standard, which will introduce stricter limits on particulates from ICE cars in November 2026.

This "adds costs to the vehicle but not too crazily", said Schäfer.

As previously reported by Autocar, the combination of GSR2 and Euro 7 contributed to the demise of the Ford Fiesta in mid-2023.

Manufacturers also face new legislation curbing the number of ICE cars they can sell in certain markets, such as the zero-emission vehicle mandate in the UK.

This year, 28% of each volume manufacturer's sales must be electric, or they must make drastic reductions in their ICE cars' total CO_2 emissions

ORIGINAL 2 WAS 'A BREATH OF FRESH AIR'

When the Mazda 2 first arrived in the UK in 2003, it was one of many superminis on sale, competing against the likes of the Volkswagen Polo, Toyota Yaris and Ford Fiesta. And yet it still stood out, with our review calling it a "breath of fresh air" in the segment. Scan this QR code to read the original review in full.

ROOM, BUT NOT ENOUGH ZOOM

(significant reductions earn credits that allow extra sales of ICE cars).

This incentivises manufacturers to reduce sales of less profitable ICE cars in favour of larger and more luxurious models, on which there is more money to be made.

It also encourages a move towards plug-in hybrids with large batteries and therefore lower official CO_2 emissions ratings.

For instance, the Volkswagen Golf eHybrid emits 9g/km, according to the official WLTP test, while the entry-level Polo puts out more than 13 times that, at 122g/km.

It seems the shift away from small hatchbacks and towards more complex and more expensive SUVs is only set to continue, tall-bodied models having accounted for 54% of all new car sales in Europe last year.

CHARLIE MARTIN

THE PURE-PETROL SUPERMINIS YOU CAN STILL BUY NEW

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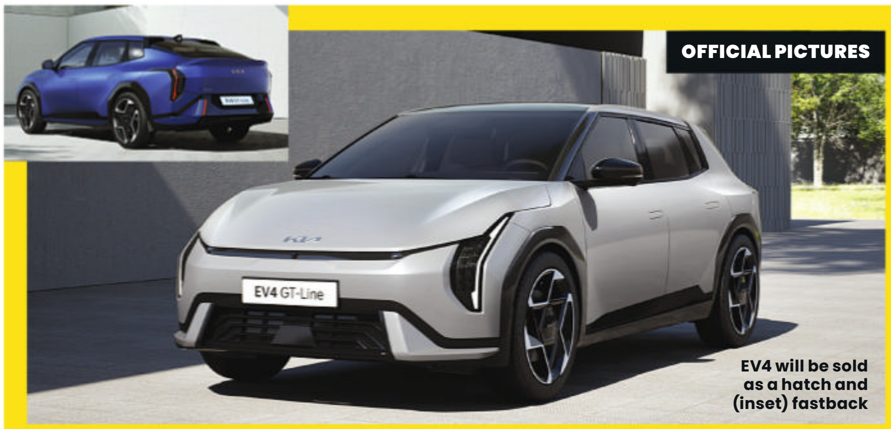


EV4 will be sold as a hatch and (inset) fastback

KIA LINES UP EV4 TO TAKE ON VW ID 3 – PLUS £25K R5 RIVAL

KIA HAS REVEALED the production-ready design of the EV4, a Volkswagen ID 3 rival, ahead of its launch later this year.

Remaining true to the concept shown in 2023, the new EV4 will fill the gap between the EV3 hatchback and the EV5 SUV, which is due to be launched in Europe soon.

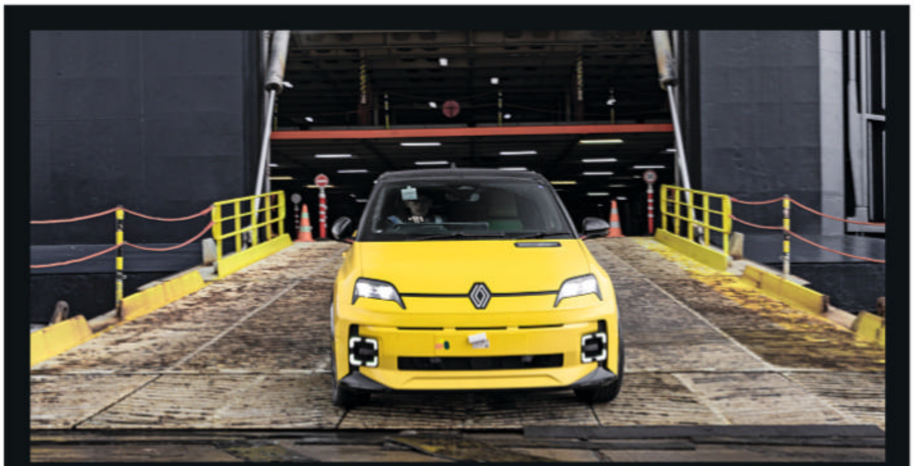
The EV4 will be sold primarily as a five-door hatchback in Europe. A four-door fastback, aimed mainly at other global markets, will be available, however.

Kia hasn't disclosed spec details yet, but the car is expected to share its E-GMP platform with the firm's other bespoke EVs and therefore be offered with a choice of battery sizes and both front- and four-wheel drive. Its maximum range should exceed 350 miles, but it is likely to stick with 400V charging for top-up speeds of up to 128kW.

All Kia EV models are destined to receive hot GT versions, so a 4WD range-topper with power and pace to match the Tesla Model 3 Performance is expected in due course.

Full details of the EV4 will be revealed on 27 February at Kia's annual EV Day event, where it will also unveil a concept version of the EV2, a sub-4.0m electric hatch that will take on the VW ID 2 and Renault 5 next year and be priced from around £25,000.

Preview images of the brand's new entry EV (left) suggest it has been designed with similar chunky proportions to the larger EV3 and EV9 and will be visually totally unrelated to the old Rio supermini that it effectively replaces.



RENAULT 5 OFFICIALLY LANDS IN BRITAIN

Right-hand-drive versions of the new Renault 5 are on their way from the docks to showrooms around the UK. The first shipment of customer cars arrived at Bristol last week, ahead of customer deliveries getting under way in early spring. The supermini is offered with a choice of two batteries and power outputs, with a starting price of £22,995 and a range of up to 253 miles.

PORSCHE REGROUPS AROUND ICE AFTER A YEAR TO FORGET

Firm to spend up to €800m on extra models after Taycan EV sales halved

Just 12 months ago, Oliver Blume lauded his decision to approve the Taycan electric saloon for production at his first-ever supervisory board meeting as Porsche CEO, back in 2015.

“We were talking about billions in investment. It required a lot of courage,” he recalled.

Today, Porsche is having to backtrack on its electric ambitions after a pretty grim year in which Taycan sales plummeted 49%, sales in China dived 28% and the company’s share price tumbled 53% from its 2023 peak.

The fallout has pushed Porsche to the brink of a major leadership overhaul – one that’s expected to cost the jobs of deputy chairman and chief financial officer Lutz Meschke and sales and marketing director Detlev von Platen. The pair are being blamed for the company’s downturn and a faltering share price.

Whether other top managers are being targeted remains unclear, but Blume’s dual role as both Porsche CEO and overall Volkswagen Group CEO is one that’s being questioned by investors.

In response to the stock value downturn, Porsche announced earlier this month that it would spend an additional €800 million (£666.1m) in 2025, partly to “expand the product portfolio to include additional vehicle models with combustion engines or plug-in hybrids”.

Some of that money could go towards extending the life of the petrol Macan SUV, scrapping the original plan to retire it globally in favour of the all-new Macan Electric (see road test, p30), company insiders have previously told Autocar.

While Porsche is still expected to launch the planned Cayenne Electric SUV within the next 18 months to sell alongside an updated version of the current ICE Cayenne, the electric 718 Boxster and Cayman sports cars, due for launch this year, could be delayed amid teething problems. The company’s planned ‘K1’ large SUV, tipped to get EV and ICE options, faces an even more uncertain future.

Porsche’s woes are both internal and external. Externally, it has been body slammed by the wider luxury market slowdown in China, to the point that executives have admitted they need to permanently shrink the dealer network and sales organisation there. China’s economy is partly to blame but so too is the sheer strength of the local competition, particularly on EVs.

Meanwhile, the US is poised to backtrack sharply on EVs after the return of climate-change sceptic Donald Trump to the presidency, giving a longer glide path to ICE cars.

With the US being Porsche’s strongest market (making up 28% of its 310,718 total sales in 2024) and the Chinese market shrinking to 18% last year, the centre of gravity has moved back towards ICE cars, at least outside of Europe.

The internal problems are mainly Taycan-related after owners suffered a series of issues, most seriously recalls to rectify “a short circuit within the battery modules” after instances of cars catching fire during charging. Owners were advised to restrict charging to 80% of the battery limit.

Porsche then carried out a root-and-branch overhaul of the Taycan, but the updated model was hit by “a slower than planned ramp-up” last year, hurting sales.

Porsche is hopeful of a recovery, though. “It’s a situation which is not satisfying, because the Taycan is a fantastic car,” Meschke said in October last year.

Early figures from Macan Electric sales, meanwhile, are promising. Last year, the company sold 18,278 examples, putting the SUV only just behind the Taycan, despite its mid-year start. In the UK, it was the 10th-best-selling EV in January, according to the SMMT.

The progress of Porsche’s 2025 reset is being closely monitored by analysts and investors, who have had to watch glumly as the company’s shares first jumped and then collapsed in value following its market listing in September 2022.

The whole idea of floating Porsche separately from the Volkswagen Group was to create a Ferrari-chasing profit machine valued more as a luxury brand than a car company. So far, it hasn’t worked out.

“A premium multiple

New Cayenne will take Porsche EVs into lucrative luxury SUV market

> **“The whole idea of floating Porsche was to create a Ferrari-chasing profit machine. So far, it hasn’t worked out”**

911 continues to be Porsche’s source of comfort

Taycan Turbo S

requires premium execution," noted Deutsche Bank analyst Tim Rokossa after Porsche told investors 2025 was going to be a lot tougher than first thought.

"This is Porsche's last shot to prove they can turn around this business before losing more trust of long-term shareholders."

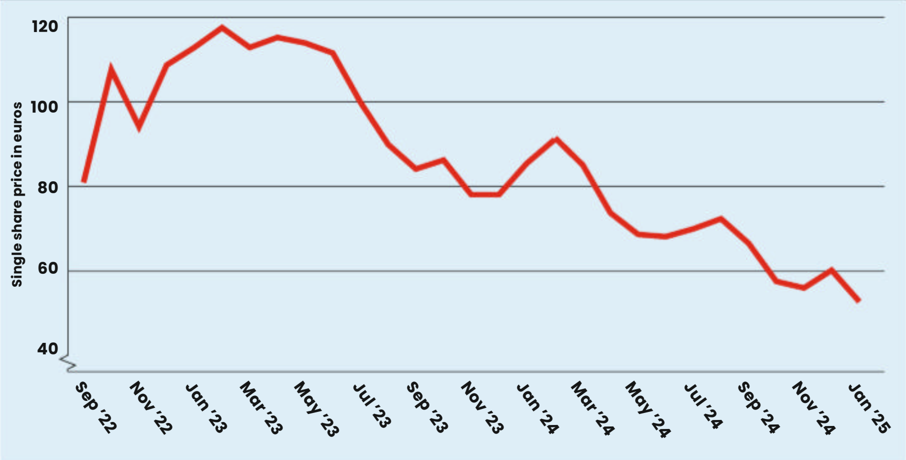
Porsche could use this moment to halt its global expansion, which has tripled annual sales from just under 100,000 in 2010, and "re-emphasise value over volumes", according to Berenberg bank analyst Romain Gourvil.

The 911 has long been the mainstay of Porsche's profits, and this year the 992 version is moving into its second phase, including the first hybrid version. The company retreating back into the security of the 911 fortification to wait for the global chaos outside to subside would be understandable.

As global markets continue to fragment, Porsche once again has to make a decision of similar courage to the one it made 10 years ago and hope that future circumstances are kinder to it than they were in 2024 – a year to forget.

NICK GIBBS

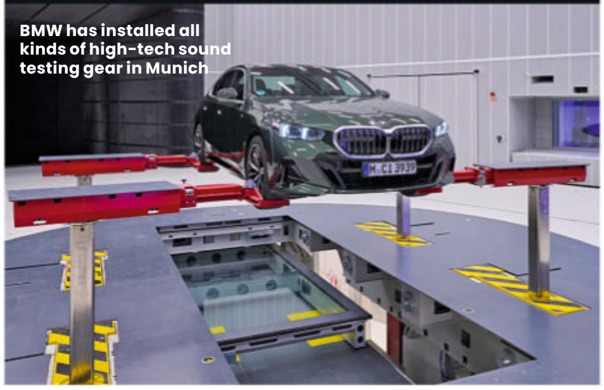
PORSCHE'S PLUMMETING MARKET VALUE



CEO Oliver Blume bet big on Taycan – but its sales have fallen sharply

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



BMW has installed all kinds of high-tech sound testing gear in Munich

HOW BMW HAS REFINED ITS REFINEMENT REFINERY

WITH THE SHIFT to EVs and their near-silent drivetrains, the pressure to scrutinise noise generation from wind, tyres and vibration is getting even stronger, especially for premium manufacturers.

BMW recently opened a new test facility called the Aeroacoustics and Electric Drive Centre (AEC) to replace its acoustic wind tunnel, which is almost 40 years old. Located at the BMW Group Research and Innovation Centre (the FIZ) in Munich, the new facility follows the addition of the Environmental Test Centre to the FIZ back in 2010.

Geared up for the fast development of electric vehicle drivetrains, the AEC consists of two parts. One is multifunctional, housing workshops for prototype work and testing equipment, the other an aeroacoustic wind tunnel, which is claimed to be the quietest and largest in the world, at 100m long, 45m high and 25m wide.

Not surprisingly, designing a wind tunnel to be capable of measuring the noise levels of and in cars that are already intrinsically quiet poses challenges not just in terms of the equipment used but in the construction too.

The two buildings were built in a giant pit to decouple them from the surrounding area, with a 3m-thick floor slab and a sound-insulated façade to isolate them from external noise and vibration.

The buildings are partially separated from each other, with the second building (which BMW likens to a "semi-detached house") housing workshops, testing and measurement stands and prototype assembly lines. This section occupies 15,000 square metres over several floors, with a further 800 square metres set aside for manufacturing future inverters in clean-room conditions.

The main test chamber has a background noise level of 54.3dBA with a car travelling at the equivalent of 87mph on the built-in rolling road, which BMW describes as the equivalent of speaking in hushed tones or the noise made by a quiet air-conditioning system.

With intrusive noise being at such low levels, measuring the noise of headwind accurately is much more precise. The maximum wind speed the tunnel can generate is 155mph, thanks to a 4.5MW blower, which at that speed is moving 100,000 cubic metres of air through the tunnel every minute.

The chamber is rated as an acoustic semi-free-field space, meaning none of the surfaces apart from the floor reflects any sound at all.

One of the latest gadgets used to measure sound is a 216-microphone 'acoustic camera' that can pinpoint the source of a sound to within a centimetre.

The wind tunnel also has a laser vibrometry system for measuring mechanical vibration of the entire vehicle surface using laser light rather than mechanical contact.

Cars can be acoustically tested while stationary or while running on a four-wheel-drive rolling road dynamometer, with or without wind in both cases.

Abu Dhabi-backed Forseven has execs from JLR, Lotus and McLaren

TOP TALENT LURED BY LUXURY UK START-UP

Major backers and industry leaders aim to make Forseven a Bentley rival

A little-known British EV start-up has been quietly recruiting some of the industry's best-known executives as it gears up to launch an assault on the global luxury car market.

Named Forseven, the three-year-old company is backed by McLaren Automotive and Gordon Murray Technologies owner CYVN Holdings, an investment group majority-owned by the Abu Dhabi government.

What makes this UK start-up especially interesting is that it has managed to attract some of Britain's biggest names, despite never having revealed any sort of car or concept. These include many who were at JLR during the firm's purple patch in the early 2010s.

Its CEO is former JLR vehicle programme chief Nick Collins, who was involved in hybridising the Range Rover, as well as overseeing the development of the future electric Jaguars.

In charge of design is Alister Whelan, who held several high-ranking interior design roles at Jaguar between 2007 and 2021 and helped to launch the F-Type and F-Pace.

The firm's managing director is Mike Flewitt, CEO of McLaren Automotive between June 2012 and December 2021, during which time the company launched landmark models including the P1 and Senna hypercars.

Forseven has also hoovered up several refugees from Lotus, following that firm's acquisition by Geely. These include Mike Johnstone, former commercial director of the Lotus Group, and Conor Horne, who led Lotus Cars' operations in the UK and Ireland.

Johnstone remains a commercial director

PEUGEOT 5008s TRADE THIRD ROW FOR BIGGER BOOT

PEUGEOT HAS LAUNCHED the five-seat version of its 5008 SUV, trading its third row for extra boot space.

The car has 994 litres of cargo space behind the second row of seats, which is 78 litres more than in the seven-seat version when its third row is folded flat.

For reference, the space in the five-seater is just 100 litres shy of that in the mammoth Land Rover Defender 130.

The five-seat option will be available on all versions of the combustion-engined 5008 and electric e-5008 but not in all markets.

This is believed to include the new dual-motor, four-wheel-drive e-5008, which offers 321bhp and 311 miles between charges.

The five-seat 5008 is expected to slightly undercut the seven-seat version, which starts at £38,095 in mild-hybrid form and £48,595 as an EV.

Customer deliveries will begin by June.

New five-seat 5008 offers same powertrains as seven-seater

“Last year, Forseven signed a deal with Nio to gain access to its EV platforms”

with Forseven while Horne assumes the role of director of commercial readiness.

Forseven’s hiring spree continues: the company currently has dozens of high-profile vacancies listed on its website, including for a head of quality, a manufacturing process lead and a product strategy lead. These cover three sites: Bicester (Oxfordshire), Leamington Spa (Warwickshire) and Shalford (Surrey).

Forseven is clear in stating that it is a “British luxury” brand, working to the principle of “sophistication with purpose”.

That the company has poached so many senior JLR staffers suggests that this is the sphere in which it will operate, battling the likes of Bentley and Porsche.

Forseven’s cars are most likely to use battery-electric powertrains. Last year, it signed a licensing agreement with Nio – the Chinese car firm in which CYVN also has a $2.9 billion (£2.3bn) stake – to gain access to the company’s EV platforms.

For reference, Nio’s most advanced model, the ET9, can charge at up to 600kW and offers ranges of more than 400 miles, although this is according to China’s lenient CLTC test. The ET9 also gets a 455bhp dual-motor powertrain, allowing it to dispatch 0-62mph in 4.3sec.

Notably, Forseven says its cars will “blend British elegance with ferocious intelligence”, hinting at a focus on digital tech.

It will most likely still be years before we see a Forseven car. That the company is still hiring a manufacturing process lead suggests it has yet to finalise a production-ready design, at the very least. And that means it will arrive in an even more competitive market than that of today: Jaguar and Bentley will have launched their electric flagships by then, and Rolls-Royce will be well on its way to being an EV-only brand.

CHARLIE MARTIN

Ex-JLR leaders Whelan (top) and Collins have key roles at Forseven

IS THERE ROOM FOR A NEW UK LUXURY BRAND?

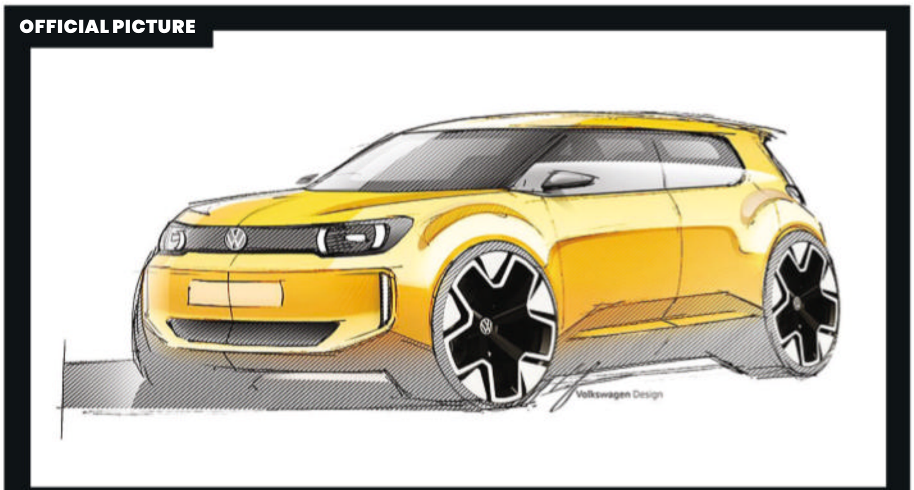
STEVE CROPLEY

It’s a fair question, given the number of British marques that have failed for lack of viability (Lagonda, Daimler, Riley, Wolseley). Don’t forget Dyson. And it’s an especially fair question when the traditional customer’s view of the brand it is trying to emulate in Jaguar – by its maker’s admission – has run out of road.

There will always be room for a new brand if the products are good enough. But in the case of Forseven, the evidence so far is only that it has bags of Abu Dhabi cash and its leading personnel have had stellar car careers.

For now, the air is full of flowery phrases: “ferocious intelligence” and “unforgettable technology” that are “unbound by time”. But crafting this stuff is the fun phase. If Forseven is to be viable, it must soon start revealing the true brand of its cars, and how they will fit a luxury car market that only increases in complexity. We wait with excited anticipation.

OFFICIAL PICTURE



VW’S £17K EV CITY CAR SHOWS ITS FACE

Volkswagen has released a sketch of the ID Every 1 concept that provides a first look at its styling ahead of its unveiling next month. It has chunky, upright proportions and a scowling face, giving it a look distinct from that of the larger ID 2. The production ID 1, due in 2027, will replace the Up and be priced from “about €20,000” (£17,000).

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Aparicio previously led Audi in his native Spain for six years

A PREMIUM BRAND can make cars at volume, but Audi has at times in the recent past made volume cars that happen to wear a premium badge. The fact that it’s on its third CEO since 2020 suggests somewhat of a crisis in where it goes next.

In the UK, while Audi was the UK’s third-best-selling brand in 2024, its sales dropped 11% versus 2023. They were down another 27% in January to start 2025.

Still, UK boss José Miguel Aparicio is not concerned. He said the figures last year were skewed by a bumper 2023 caused by clearing an order backlog from the industry-wide semiconductor shortage.

More significantly, despite a plan to launch 20 new models across 2024 and 2025, half of which will be EVs, Aparicio “doesn’t expect to increase sales this year. On the contrary, I expect some more impact.”

The focus instead is to “re-establish Audi’s premium feeling” with larger and more luxurious models that “reinforce the premiumness of the brand”.

“Now it’s more about quality and a premium mindset, not going into the market at any price,” said Aparicio. “We’re not looking to conquest or add market share; it’s a healthy business, a quality business. Of course we want to stay with high volumes, but that’s not the target.”

The inference is that Audi has lost its premium aura and drifted more into becoming a mainstream player. It’s hard to argue with that statement when you see the likes of the A1 and Q2 – models that won’t be replaced.

The hiring of Massimo Frascella as design boss from JLR, where he played a key role in the ever more luxurious growth of the Range Rover brand, also says plenty about where Audi would like to shift.

Aparicio agrees that this new plan marks a definite change in approach for Audi from its recent volume-building focus.

“Short-term targets should not compromise long-term brand perception,” he said.

In addition, Audi will reboot its Vorsprung durch Technik marketing slogan and use that as a reference point particularly for its EVs.

Aparicio said the slogan can cover everything from fast charging, range and aerodynamic efficiency to lighting and infotainment tech, as well as the technical proficiency of Audi’s cars.

“While it’s a completely new era with EVs, we want to place ourselves in the same way as the past, but this is not granted,” he said.

“Our aim is to reinforce the brand’s premium feeling”

”We’re proud of our heritage but can’t rely on it with everything moving around.”

Emerging, then, is a perhaps less dogmatic Audi - something seen in its recent decision to reverse a perplexing strategy of giving ICE models odd-numbered names and EVs even-numbered ones.

“We’ve listened to feedback and we very much changed our minds,” said Aparicio. “It’s important to keep assets like A6 and especially RS6 [which would have been renamed A7 and RS7]. This is a sign of us being humble.”

UNCERTAINTY TROUBLING EV CHARGER COMPANIES

Review of ZEV mandate has worsened already "challenging backdrop"

One of the UK's largest charger companies is facing a fight for its future, after the slowdown in EV take-up wiped more than £10 million from its market value overnight.

On the release of its 2024 results, which revealed a £7m shortfall on its revenue target of £60m, Pod Point's share price fell 41%.

The EDF-owned company, which has installed 250,000 chargers since 2009, blamed its downbeat forecast on the UK government's recently launched zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate review, saying this is causing uncertainty and worsening an already "challenging backdrop".

In real terms, it said this meant fewer private buyers were choosing EVs, resulting in a drop in sales of its chargers during 2024.

CEO Melanie Lane said that although Pod Point "achieved a lot in 2024 against a difficult market backdrop", it "proved to be a transitional year in terms of our financial performance".

She continued: "We made good progress on our costs but the weaker-than-expected private EV market has negatively impacted revenues."

Pod Point's troubles shed light on some of the key challenges shared by all parts of the EV market as it feels its way towards 2030 – by which date 80% of a car manufacturer's total sales in the UK must be electric, up from 28% in 2025.

Like designing and building EVs, developing EV infrastructure costs a lot of money, and investment plans are hit by any slowdown in demand.

"No charging operators are making a profit today," said Ben Fritsch, head of growth at Connected Kerb. "We're all investing to meet future demand."

Connected Kerb installs chargers in areas where driveways are a rarity but the population is large enough to justify an investment. Pod Point, meanwhile, installs chargers at homes and workplaces. They are two very different businesses, but both are spending big in expectation of better times ahead.

Last month, the government announced that Connected Kerb, which has 100,000 subscribers, will be given £55m from the National Wealth Fund. A further £10m will come from Aviva Investors, one of the company's investor partners.

"We doubled our charging network last year, from 3500 sockets available to 6200, so we're capital-hungry," explained Fritsch. "We need this £65m to keep going as we work to almost quadruple the size of our network to almost 40,000 by the end of 2027."

STATE OF PLAY

73,334
Number of public EV chargers in the UK in January 2025.

14,448
Number of public EV chargers that work at 50kW or above.

5%
Increase in number of chargers since October 2024.

Pod Point network includes public and private EV chargers

Of the 9000 chargers that Connected Kerb has installed so far, 6000 are operational while a little under 3000 are dormant, some of these ready to go live when demand justifies it and others waiting for power to become available.

Another charging company doing likewise is Instavolt. Familiar at service stations and from its growing network of hubs (its next, with 44 chargers, will open at Winchester in March), Instavolt develops, installs and operates ultra-rapid charging stations.

"We're a profitable business investing millions every year, all of it private money," said CEO Delvin Lane. "This year and next, we will invest £70m."

He is confident that this will be money well spent, saying: "We're at a tipping point. EV registrations are increasing at the expense of petrol and diesel cars. Car makers almost hit the 22% ZEV mandate [EV sales mix target] last year and this year there are many more affordable EVs coming to the market. Our daily utilisation rate is well over 120kW per charger. We're on an upward curve."

Nevertheless, Lane believes there's more the government can do to help accelerate EV uptake.

Echoing the demands from UK lobby groups, such as the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, Lane said: "We want VAT parity between home and public charging, so a flat 5%."

VAT on charging is currently 20% away from the home.

Lane continued: "Better co-ordination with local planning authorities will help speed up the development of new charging sites. Clearer signage on motorways – the laws around signage are archaic – will give drivers confidence that the charging network is here and growing."

For companies like Pod Point, Connected Kerb and Instavolt faced with making big investment decisions in the coming years, such confidence is going to be crucial.

JOHN EVANS

Private EV sales slump has meant fewer people buying home wallboxes

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Tempted by this pristine 1960s 1.6-litre Alfa Giulia Spider? It's yours for £60k

MONDAY

You would reckon, after a few years' match practice, that I'd have learned that looking at interesting cars takes a lot of time, but with three car-loving friends I relearned it today by visiting the Classic Motor Hub, a dealer in interesting cars local to us all in Bibury, Gloucestershire.

Its main business is selling 'important' classics (it has plenty of stock for people with £200k-plus in the kitty), but I was particularly taken with the relative affordability of sports cars. There was a lovely Alfa Giulia Spider, a BMW Z1, a Triumph TR4A and a red and white Austin-Healey 100-6. They all fitted neatly into the £35k-£60k bracket – my own outlay for a hobby car. A couple of nice Series 1 Land Rovers slotted in there as well.

We set out at 10am and arrived back after 4pm, having taken coffee and a lunch snack at The Hub and called in at a local classic motorbike dealer called CTL Motors on the way home. None of us bought anything (although I was seized by the sudden need for a six-cylinder Kawasaki Z1300), but the conversation showed how susceptible we were. Simple days with car-mad mates are the best fun of all.

New Forester has reinforced Cropley's admiration for Subaru

> **"Simple days with car-mad mates are the best fun of all"**

TUESDAY

I dropped in at the Midlands launch of the new Subaru Forester, reaffirming my liking for a marque that I align with Suzuki for the cheerful non-conformism of its engineering. (It's interesting that the top people at Toyota favour these marques as well; they've struck co-operative deals with both.) Unusually, Subaru's people sent us around their test route in the outgoing model before we drove the new one, a great way of drawing attention to three invisible changes that greatly improve the 2025 edition: a stiffer chassis, improvements to soundproofing in the roof and a clever twin-pinion steering system. As a result, the car now has much less road and bump noise and its handling is much improved. Turn to p24 for my full review.

WEDNESDAY

A grand total of 17 used Jaguar I-Pace owners replied to my enquiry about their experiences. They made an interesting and reassuring group: all perceived that there was a risk in running such a car beyond its three-year warranty period, all had researched the matter as thoroughly as possible, all had chosen their car carefully and more than half had protected themselves with an extended warranty. Beyond that there was unanimity: good move 17, disasters nil.

There was lots of wise advice, too. Post-2022 cars have updated software for a longer range. Jaguar dealers offer a two-year warranty on their (rapidly dwindling) used car stock. 'Management' I-Paces straight from JLR make a lot of sense if you can find one (at around £45k). Despite the march of progress, our panel reckoned the I-Pace still compares well with the best for looks, space, interior quality and dynamics. Nearly everyone advised caring for the battery – keep charge levels between 30% and 80% and avoid too much fast charging – but none had experienced a battery disaster. Enjoy a great car, was the advice, but take care.

FRIDAY

Own a special car? Worried about the future effects of detrimental regulations as the political climate changes? One important way to improve the situation is to participate in the latest historic vehicles survey conducted by the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs, a national body that works hard to keep historic and unusual vehicles on the road. It does this survey every five years, using the data to alert the authorities to the needs and wants (and voting power) of people like us. Please get involved; take 10 minutes. Details at fbhvc.co.uk/survey.

AND ANOTHER THING

Talking Suzuki (above) reminds me that the admirable Young Driver network – Britain's biggest trainer of pre-17-year-old drivers – has just spent £2 million changing its fleet of Vauxhall Corsas for 170 Suzuki Swift hybrids, on the grounds that they're lighter, greener, more reliable and easier to drive. Apparently the seat design can handle kids a year younger too, aged just nine.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Is it okay to be pleased that Honda and Nissan have decided not to merge, after all?

The two Japanese companies last week decided not to follow through on a proposed deal that was met with a fair degree of surprise when they first announced they were considering it at the end of last year.

Now, after more serious talks, the merger has been officially canned after it turned out that it might not have been quite such a 'merger of equals' as Nissan originally thought. Like a football manager leaving a club 'by mutual consent', things would have been a bit more mutual on one side than the other.

Nissan, in a weaker place than Honda (having a market capitalisation of £8 billion, compared with £31bn), risked effectively being a Honda subsidiary – a position it couldn't countenance. Instead, the two companies have decided to carry on working together on products and technology but remain separate entities.

From a business perspective, I don't know whether this is a good thing or not. Honestly, I've no idea. Would it save loads of money if they shared the same offices and accountants and window cleaners and sandwich providers and so on? Shrug of shoulders. Will they survive independently in a world increasingly dominated by state-underwritten Chinese EV makers? Hit me up if you know either way.

But what I do know is that I've always liked Honda because of the kind of independent thinking that brought us the NSX and a business jet with engines on top of the wings and which won it the Isle of Man TT a gazillion times.

And there's something quite cool about Nissan's commitment to its Z cars, plus the 17-year production run of the R35 GT-R (even if you can no longer buy it in most countries and production will have to stop this summer).

Could NSX have come from a multi-brand group? Seems unlikely

We've heard plenty of stories about enthusiastic engineering managers persuading their bigger bosses to give a little money here and there so that Nissan sports cars can still make it into production.

In that vein, the GT-R will be back, we're told, but it might take a moment while Nissan decides whether it should have a combustion engine, electric motors or a combination of the two.

In other words, both companies still have soul and a serious independent spirit about them. And while they are undoubtedly rivals, making cars that compete directly with each other, when they turn their skills to making interesting cars (I grant you that this happens less often than it did), each is wilfully different from the other's.

> **"Both firms still have soul and a serious independent spirit"**

Nissan brought us the Qashqai when nobody expected it, and everyone bought one. Honda gave us the E when nobody expected it, and although nobody bought it, it's got a virtual aquarium inside it and the most wonderful surface finishes. Imagine trying to pull that off with yet another committee overseeing it.

One of the characteristics of being in a big conglomerate – as we see in the Volkswagen Group and Stellantis – is that competing brands end up with cars that underneath are the same as each other's, and that inevitably means they feel a bit like it on the surface too.

I suppose that's good for business, allowing a company to make bigger and safer investments, with spending spread across larger sales volumes. Triffic, I'm sure, but I don't know that, as an enthusiast, I therefore love it that much.

And remaining solo can be dandy too. I'm reminded of the time Suzuki pulled out of an alliance with Volkswagen because it felt its independence was threatened. That was 14 years ago (minus a bit for some legal wranglings), and Suzuki still seems to be doing just fine – and is still making some cool cars that unmistakably are low-cost, low-weight Suzukis, not something else with Suzuki badging.

I like it when a proud independent company thinks 'stuff it, we'll do it our way' and keeps on keeping on with its own ideas and values.

Japanese companies seem to particularly embody it and, for good or ill, I think we're better off with more rather than less of them. I hope it actually turns out to be better for both.

GET IN TOUCH
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Z was done on a shoestring – but that's more than most firms allocate for sports cars

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Children as young as five can now kart for 96% less than the usual price

What next when you've worked at the pinnacle? For Rob Smedley, giving something back was the answer. Best known as the plain-spoken Teesside voice in Felipe Massa's ear, he has established an electric karting league to unearth racing talent from parts of society not usually associated with motorsport. In other words, to find the sort of kids who don't have the necessary equivalent of a small country's GDP behind them to push them up the racing ladder towards Formula 1.

Now Smedley has found a kindred spirit to be a partner in his quest. Ferdi Porsche is the great-grandson of the famous sports car company's founder, Ferdinand Porsche, and he too has altruistic ambitions to promote car culture among young people, under a brand he took over that carries strong racing connotations. FAT (Français Allemande Transite) was a logistics company known to petrolheads for its stickers on the Le Mans-winning Porsches of 1994 and 1997. Now under Ferdi Porsche, the brand represents something else entirely. And with Smedley, he has teamed up to launch the FAT Karting League.

ARRIVE AND DRIVE

The concept is an 'upscaling' of Smedley's UK-based Global Karting League, which was created to "collapse the price of karting", as Smedley puts it, from about £100k per season to race at the top national level here. "By collapsing that price, you open up the market," he continues. "That's then the key to better accessibility and diversity."

Rather than being open to specialist teams, the FAT Karting League works to a centrally run 'arrive and drive' concept, which allows costs to be fixed. Long dismissed as a leisure activity, arrive and drive is currently in vogue. For years, the excellent Club 100 has promoted accessible motorsport through its series and now others are following suit. Daniel Ricciardo and Jamie Chadwick have put their names to such initiatives, and in 2026 a Champions of the Future series will be launched in Britain with support from Motor Sport UK. The FIA has caught on too, officially recognising arrive-and-drive karting as motorsport's bedrock, even for those with elite-level ambitions.

> **"Collapsing the price is the key to better accessibility"**

The FAT Karting League is aimed at kids from as young as five to their mid-teens. So what does it cost? "With a season pass, which gets you a discount, for five and six years old the whole season all in is about £3.5k," says Smedley. "For older kids, it's around £4.5k. So an average of £4k. That's a full season of karting, with as much seat time as you need for that age. We recognise that it's still £4k, but it's a huge 96% saving compared to the alternative route."

KARTS WITH AN F1 DNA

Among the plan for 2025 is a prize of a funded drive in Formula 4, the bottom rung of single-seaters, for FAT's top graduate. But can electric karts prepare kids for traditional combustion-powered cars? Smedley believes they can, having recruited from Formula 1 to create a team to design and build his bespoke machinery.

FAT league is run by Porsche (left) and Smedley (right)

"The EV powertrain is based on our knowledge of MGU-K systems in [hybrid] F1 cars," he explains. "You have to drive them like conventional karts with momentum through the corners, like any racing car. We've worked very hard on that, to make it less of a leap from karts to cars."

"You can tune them easily for the level of your experience," adds Porsche. "Apart from the noise, there's no difference to traditional combustion karts. You don't have 100% power coming out of the corners, which would defeat the purpose of learning to drive properly. They're tweaked to feel like combustion karts."

GIRL SCOUTS

A bold expansion into the US has now been set in motion. Two 'hubs' will open this year in Indiana and California, with more to follow.

"In the next six years, we will have at least 50 hubs across all continents," predicts Porsche.

As with other such schemes, encouraging girls to race is key, and female participation is already at upwards of 30%.

"The ultimate proof of this plan will be if a female F1 driver comes from the FAT Karting League," says Porsche. "Nothing speaks against a girl racing in F1; it's a pure numbers game."

In other words, the more girls who race, the better the odds of finding one with F1 potential.

Smedley adds: "I come from a fairly humble background, so to do what I did in F1 was down to a little bit of competence and a lot of luck. We're totally agnostic: everyone is welcome. The FAT Karting League is open to all."

GAVIN RATHBONE

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

MY RANGE ROVER FRUSTRATION

I recently bought a new Range Rover Sport P400e – a hard-reached ambition. Before it had even hit 20,000 miles, I found myself being rescued by the AA. I knew when buying the car that JLR didn't have the best reputation for reliability but took the plunge anyway on the basis that the P400e's reputation was reasonable.

Having been unable to coax the car back to life, it was recovered to a large main dealership. The first alarm bell was when I'd heard nothing from them for a few days. When I called, I was told it would be a week before they were even able to look at the car, because "we get so many recoveries we can't keep up".

Initially, they wouldn't even provide me a courtesy car, saying none was available because I hadn't pre-booked (how they expected me to pre-book a breakdown seemed genuinely lost on the person I spoke to).

The dealer seemed totally unmoved by the entire thing, treating it as a standard event, like getting an MOT test: no apology, no acknowledgement that a sub-20,000-mile car shouldn't dump you on the side of the road.

A mere seven weeks later, the dealer diagnosed that the battery needed replacing (the car having already had £5000 worth of repairs to the EV system). JLR accepted this under the battery warranty (a relief, given I understand it costs £15k-£20k). Only then was I given a courtesy car – amusingly, a Volvo XC90 via Enterprise.

My main gripe is that even though the issue is being fixed under the battery warranty, the dealer has been unable to provide any estimate of when they will be able to complete the work. When I said that I didn't think that was reasonable, the dealer wrote: "With back-order parts, we don't have an ETA how long it will be. I have back-order parts currently six in my queue since October [sic]." They later mentioned that in some cases, they'd had to wait up to 14 months for parts.

How can it be right that it can take months to fix a car, while I'm given a loan car a fraction of the value of what I paid for? How can JLR prioritise churning out new cars when it's so behind on servicing ones that fail?

Paperwork provided to me shows JLR is paying £88.26 plus VAT a day for my Volvo use. So if some fixes really do take it a year, those will be costing it some £30k.

The moral of the story? For so long as JLR continues like this, buy shares in Enterprise.

Name supplied, via email

JLR said: "Working with our retailer partner and our supply chain, we are making every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible for our client."

UNTAPPED MARKET

I was interested to hear that the new CEO of Polestar wishes to increase sales in the UK (News, 29 January).

We would love to replace our business-lease BMW iX3 with a 3 (or perhaps 4), but there isn't a Polestar dealership in the whole of Northern Ireland – population 2.5 million.

I think they're missing a trick. For us to buy a Polestar, we will have to forgo the test drive, sign for one and then fly to Glasgow to collect it and drive it back, doing the reverse on the termination of the lease.

There are a lot of successful and wealthy firms and individuals in the province. It could even be bolted to the large Volvo dealer in Belfast.

David Thacker
Northern Ireland

I note that there isn't a Polestar dealer in Wales (population 3.1m) either – KC

EV HEALTH CONCERN

Last week, I saw a social media post that read: "In 5-10 years, we're going to find out that men who drive EVs daily are infertile, because their balls are getting cooked by insane amounts of EMF/RF [electromagnetic and radiofrequency fields] from sitting on top of the massive batteries. I'm sure their rates of cancer will be much higher too."

My instinct was to discount this as another nutty conspiracy theory, but the accompanying video showed a device detecting a high level of electromagnetism on the driver's seat of an EV. Is this something we should actually be worrying about?

Scott Michaels
Via email

The World Health Organization says: "At low frequencies, external electric and magnetic fields induce small circulating currents within the body. In virtually all ordinary environments, the levels of induced currents inside the body are too small to produce obvious effects. There is no doubt that short-term exposure to very high levels of electromagnetic fields can be harmful to health. Exposures to higher levels that might be harmful are restricted by national and international guidelines. Despite extensive research, to date there is no evidence to conclude that exposure to low-level electromagnetic fields is harmful to human health."

Worth a million points in a Northern Irish I-Spy book

The 911 Paul wants (not necessarily in this colour)

PHONING IT IN

I agree with Matt Saunders about keyless entry systems and am likewise unenthusiastic about phone apps that function as digital keys (Testing, testing, 5 February).

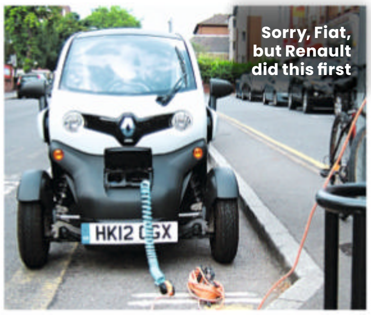
Our 2023 Lexus UX doesn't have keyless entry, but the Lexus app, which requires biometrics to log in, says it can lock or unlock the car.

On holiday in Brighton, we left the car in Hove and walked to our accommodation. Somewhere along the seafront, my partner realised he had left a book in the car, so I went back to retrieve it. I didn't have my key with me but thought the app would be fine to open and relock the car. I got to it and the app said: "Cannot unlock with app unless it was locked with the app, not the key." So utterly pointless!

Shawn Latham
Via email

COUNCIL GREED

I have so much sympathy for Gareth Rosser (Your Views, 5 February). Try Southend Council for size. The cost of parking for five hours (the time needed for a decent visit to the shops and seafront) has in a very short time been raised from around £9 to £15.



Sorry, Fiat, but Renault did this first

This is blatant greed. The town recently becoming more popular is no excuse for such over-the-top parking price increases. The words 'squeezing' and 'pips' come to mind!
Barry Dodkin
Via email

ALL IN A TWIZ

In your Fiat Grande Panda review in the 5 February issue, you said it was the first EV with a retractable charging cable and wondered why no car maker had thought of this before. Not quite right: Renault did it with the Twizy, although it's classified as a quadricycle.
Gabriel Ho
Via email

GENTLY DOES IT

Illya Verpraet's recent Porsche 911 test (20 November 2024) was comprehensive and much enjoyed.

Are there any of these 911 models that are more refined and quieter than others? I'm not looking for a Cadillac, but unlike some guys looking for a 911, I need a car good for long trips. And in this freedom-loving land, a road trip from here in Texas to see my kids in California is a good 1350 miles. So a need for some refinement sets in.

The Targa is expensive and porky, but I once heard the suspension tuning was a bit more relaxed.

I don't know… I have an Audi A6 now, so maybe I should just get an S6 and be done with it. Much of the aforementioned trip is on a level road anyway. They say west Texas is so flat you can stand on your porch and watch your dog run away for two weeks.
Paul Ehrmann
Austin, Texas, US

All 911s have quite a lot of road noise, which is probably even worse on a US concrete highway, but the quietest and most refined variant would be an entry-level Carrera coupé on the smallest wheels possible. Targas don't feel much more softly sprung than coupés these days – IV, MS, MP

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 26 FEBRUARY

GROUP TEST

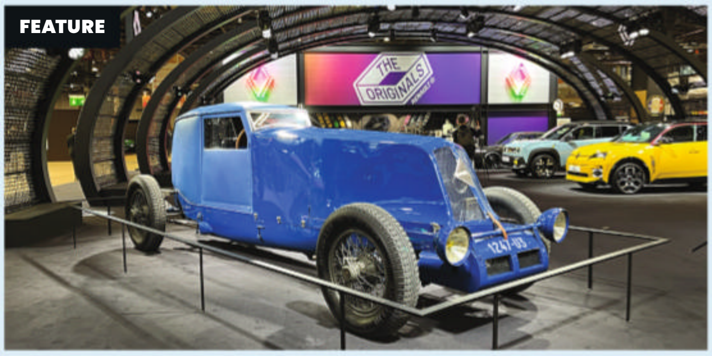
MOST FUN EV SUPERMINI NAMED

We line up the Alpine A290, Mini Cooper SE, Cupra Born VZ, MG 4 EV and more to see which electric supermini achieves the most smiles per hour

FIRST DRIVE

FERRARI 12CILINDRI SPIDER

Is Ferrari's flagship V12-powered GT just as majestic with its roof down?



FEATURE

ALL THE STAR CARS FROM RETROMOBILE IN PARIS

We explore France's top classic car show and pick out the highlights

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH AN…

INEOS GRENADIER

How will we get on with this 2025 alternative to a classic Defender?

USED GUIDE

SKODA OCTAVIA

Practical all-rounder is good value new but even better used

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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Circulation enquiries: Frontline Ltd, 1st Floor, Stuart House, St John's Street, Peterborough, PE1 5DD (01733 555161). Printed by William Gibbons, Wolverhampton. Registered as a newspaper with the Royal Mail. Member of the ABC. ISSN 1355-8293.

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 11.2.25, MALAGA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** MARCH

MASERATI MC20 GT2 STRADALE

Race version of likeable supercar escapes the track

The race championship that has inspired this faster, more focused version of Maserati's eminently likeable MC20 supercar is called the GT2 European Series, which sounds very, very fast – but that's somewhat misleading.

The cars in this mostly amateur endeavour sit somewhere between GT3 and GT4 machinery in terms of their performance, suiting mildly uprated road cars. Those homologated include the Porsche 911, KTM X-Bow and Mercedes-AMG GT. The MC20 was made racy in 2023 and has since won quite a few times.

Now Maserati has created a limited-edition road-going variant to mark the brand's return to the track. And while the European GT2 series isn't super-professional international GT racing, there is at least an identifiable link between the race and road cars.

The MC20 GT2 Stradale, limited to 914 units and coming in £46,000 more expensive than standard, at £273,510, gets the kind of changes that make it a more capable, but also more dependable, track car.

"This car needs to breathe a lot," designer Francesco Morosi says about its uprated cooling, for which he has added a larger front grille and 16% bigger rear wing vents, which let 5% more airflow to the main radiator and increase intercooler performance by 20%.

Other sculpting and vents let twice as much heat get out of the GT2 as the standard MC20. Over 10 laps of Stellantis's Balocco test track, the brake fluid stays 40deg C cooler.

Power from the 3.0-litre twin-turbocharged V6 is up by only 10bhp, to 631bhp, all achieved electronically. The additional cooling "avoids any deterioration in performance" in a car that, I suspect unlike the standard MC20, could spend a reasonable proportion of its time on circuit.

To that end, there's more downforce too. The three-stage adjustable big rear wing most obviously, but there's a new rear diffuser and front splitter too, plus different underbody treatment.

As the name suggests, the GT2 Stradale seems at home on both track and road

“There’s something of the old Ferrari 488 Pista about it”

Carbonfibre seats and Alcantara trim lift an already pleasant interior

Big rear wing stays within the footprint of the car to meet safety regs

TESTER’S NOTE

The fancy new seats are great on circuit and feature lovely ‘made in Modena’ graphics but left me short of lower back support over distance on road. **MP**

At 174mph, the front wheels will have 130kg of downforce, and the rear between 190kg and 370kg, depending on wing position, for a maximum of 500kg total.

Impressively, the drag coefficient is unchanged at 0.38, leaving the top speed unchanged at 201mph.

A fair bit of weight has come out of the MC20 too: up to 60kg. Most of the thanks for that – 20kg worth – goes to the seats, which are bespoke carbonfibre buckets from Sabelt (although you can spec the standard ones back in if you want). Michelin Cup 2 R tyres (245/35 R20 front, 305/30 R20 rear) save 5kg, 5kg of carpets have been removed and 2kg of centre console material has been shaved off.

Inside, Maserati has used Alcantara heavily to limit reflections – a method used to apparent good effect in the race car and one of which I wholly approve. The new seats give a lower, more upright driving position, the steering wheel gets little shift lights dotted ever so neatly in the rim, while the drive selector has been moved upwards and forwards to make it easier to grab while you’re paying attention to driving. I’m pro this too.

The springs are around 10% stiffer, but otherwise the dynamics hardware is fundamentally unchanged, just retuned.

As standard, like the regular MC20, you get a mechanical limited-slip differential, but an electronically controlled one, which is all we have ever tried, is optional.

You can move through drive modes to firm the dampers, which also punches gearshifts through harder and slackens off the driver aids. The most lax mode turns off the stability and traction control, makes the diff really aggressive and knocks the ABS intervention back to the minimum that Maserati can get away with within road regulations.

We like the regular MC20: it’s a relaxed and honest supercar that rides well. And tightening up the springs a little really hasn’t spoiled that. Body control is good too, even in the slackest damper modes. By modern standards, with a kerb weight probably in the 1500kgs (Maserati quotes only a dry weight, annoyingly), this isn’t a heavy car.

Noise levels are higher than standard, and with stones pinging up onto the underside yet still pliant suspension, there’s something of the old Ferrari 488 Pista about it, albeit with a boostier engine and calmer steering. Very satisfying, very easy to get along with.

On track, largely the same is true. The GT2 Stradale feels less raw than the Porsche 911 GT3 or one of the more extreme last Lamborghini Huracáns. It’s more approachable, rides kerbs with genuine absorbance and has small amounts of roll and pitch even in its firmest suspension setting but allows the driver to develop a flow with it, rewarding smooth inputs rather than aggressive ones.

In steady-state cornering it will understeer slightly, as I suppose it should. You can power through it or, less scruffy and more satisfying, trail brake to get the nose more planted on corner entry.

With no electrical assistance weighing it down, or an aggressively hooked-up differential, I found it a real pleasure on track.

The MC20 is a left-field choice, and I don’t suppose it’s any more mainstream in GT2 Stradale form, but, with all the honesty of the standard car and a bit more focus, it’s no less desirable.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

MASERATI MC20 GT2 STRADALE

By retaining the best bits and upping the drama, Maserati has done to the MC20 what Porsche’s GT division does to 911s

Price £273,510
Engine V6, 3000cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 631bhp at 7500rpm
Torque 531lb ft at 3000-5500rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD
Dry weight 1365kg
0-62mph 2.8sec
Top speed 201mph
Economy 24.4mpg
CO_2, tax band 265g/km, 37%
Rivals Alpine A110 R Ultime, Lamborghini Temerario, Porsche 911 S/T

TESTED 5.2.25, WARWICKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

SUBARU FORESTER

Incremental improvements for sixth iteration of countryside favourite

The new sixth-generation Subaru Forester may be closely related to the previous model, but it has been improved in eye-catching ways.

At present, this large SUV takes around 30% of Subaru UK's 2400 annual sales, being very much the choice of traditionalists seeking rugged and dependable transport. By the end of 2026, it will be a key part of a six-strong model line-up – half of those electric – with more to come as the Japanese brand endeavours to grow here.

There are three iterations of the Forester, all well equipped and now with names to match other Subarus. The entry-level Limited (heated and electrically adjustable seats, 360deg cameras, 18in alloy wheels) starts at £38,995 – £1000 more than before. The Field adds sat-nav, a powered tailgate and a heated steering wheel for another £1445, while the Touring has a sliding sunroof, 19in alloys, heated rear seats and black leather upholstery for £42,995.

Like its predecessor, the new Forester uses the Subaru Global Platform, but judicious changes have been made. It's 10% stiffer in torsion, as a result of beefier suspension mounts and a tougher inner chassis frame, and there's extra soundproofing, notably in the roof, from which Subaru claims a 39% drop in cabin noise.

Exterior body modifications aimed mainly at freshening the front and rear styling and enhancing the aerodynamics mean the overall length has grown by 30mm to 4.67m, while the width has increased by 15mm to 1.83m, yet the car keeps its feeling of compactness, which has always suited rural users, its staple buyers.

The big news is an all-new interior composed of materials that emphasise durability over luxury. A new fascia is dominated by an 11.6in touchscreen that at last offers Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Subaru has heard the complaints

Subaru is still making gains with 'FB' after 15 years – and still minus a turbo

TESTER'S NOTE

The steps added to the CVT by electronic control make it seem more like a conventional torque-converter automatic. It works really well – arguably better at walking pace in heavy traffic. **SC** of drivers who dislike touchscreens, though, so there are still separate buttons for controlling the audio and interior temperature.

The brand's ADAS suite, Eyesight, has gained five new facilities for this model, taking the total to 15. They work well enough and 'undesirables' like lane keeping assistance can be easily disabled.

The Forester has an airy cabin with a large glass area, boosted by relatively thin pillars. There are front and rear quarterlights and the window sill height has been lowered to make things even better.

Being a relatively upright car (at 1.73m tall) means the driving position gives you a commanding view and there's impressive rear seat room and generous boot space.

A revised design for the front seats has increased initial comfort, but the biggest advantage is a new form of lower back support that's claimed to cut head-toss by 44% and is detectable in the first few yards of driving.

The Forester's naturally aspirated 2.0-litre petrol flat four, electric motor and stepped CVT (named Lineartronic) come directly from other cars, but Subaru cites 24 subtle engine refinements.

Legislation-driven tweaks have reduced power from 148bhp to 134bhp, leaving the Forester with a leisurely 0-62mph time of 12.2sec. It doesn't feel especially slow in normal driving but lacks urgency in passing manoeuvres.

The Lineartronic 'box scrolls automatically through its seven steps, mainly there to normalise the driving experience for those used to conventional automatics. There's a Sport setting on the steering wheel that sharpens things and the driver has recourse to shift paddles, mostly useful for engine braking on downslopes.

Full-time four-wheel drive, split 50:50 front to rear, is a Subaru given.

On the UK launch, I was allowed to drive the outgoing model before testing the new one – a perfect way of feeling the effects of the new seats, the new soundproofing and especially a new dual-pinion electric power steering system that removes over-lightness and vagueness and replaces it with feedback worthy of the best.

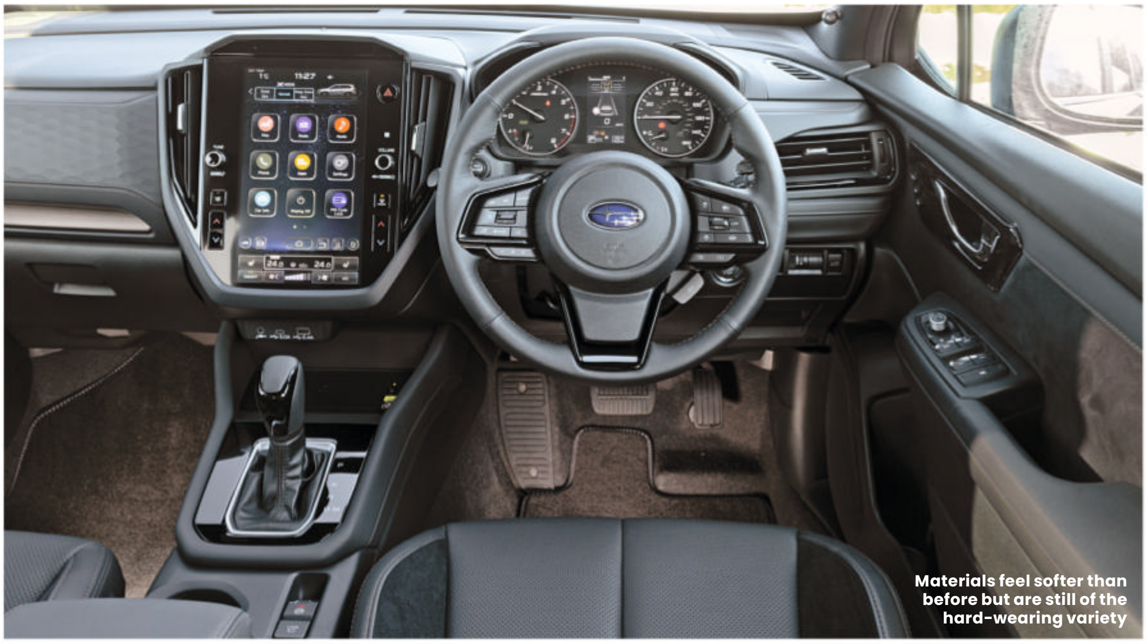
Apart from that, the Forester delivers what you expect it to: a compliant ride that swallows potholes while remaining flat and comfortable. A minor ill effect of fairly relaxed spring rates is more body roll in hard corners than you will experience in German equivalents. The extra soundproofing and chassis rigidity reduce road noise radically and give the car a relaxing gait, especially given its tall gearing when cruising.

I didn't get to try the Forester off road, but generations of owners buy these cars for their traction and class-leading 220mm ground clearance, and Subaru claims to have made traction improvements for this latest model.

The Forester continues to live up to its reputation for quality and reliability, while the well-judged tranche of improvements for this sixth-generation car make it far nicer to steer and handle and more comfortable over long distances. It remains the epitome of a complete car, then: well priced against rivals, comfortable for all and happy either on sunny motorways or blizzardy tracks that would stop most rivals. It works for everyone everywhere.

STEVE CROPLEY

"It remains the epitome of a complete car, working for everyone everywhere"



Materials feel softer than before but are still of the hard-wearing variety

Smarter design cloaks familiar mechanicals

TECH SPEC

SUBARU FORESTER 2.0i E-BOXER FIELD

Improvements to both comfort and dynamics, offered at minimal extra cost, give the Forester a new lease of life

★★★⯪☆

Price £40,440
Engine 4 cyls horizontally opposed, 1995cc, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 134bhp at 5600rpm (engine), 16bhp (motor)
Torque 134lb ft at 4000rpm (engine), 47lb ft (motor)
Gearbox CVT, 4WD
Kerb weight 1717kg
0-62mph 12.2sec
Top speed 117mph
Economy 34.9mpg
CO$_2$, tax band 183g/km, 37%
Rivals Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX-5

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Matt Prior
Steve Cropley

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TESTED 12.2.25, EAST SUSSEX **DELIVERIES** MARCH

LEAPMOTOR C10

Stellantis-backed Chinese EV brand makes UK debut with large SUV

Ride and handling lack finesse, but not problematically so

Driver is given plastic, pleather, pixels and cameras watching over them

Boop, boop, boop, boop, boop. Beep, beep, beep. Etc. You probably expect a higher standard of writing from Autocar than some disconnected onomatopoeia, but then we expect a higher standard of safety systems in cars.

During my first handful of miles in the Leapmotor C10, it would not shut up for more than 10 seconds. Eventually, I figured out that the driver monitoring system couldn't recognise my face and I turned it off (the system, not my face), together with the lane keeping assist, which tugs at the steering incessantly.

Leapmotor is the latest Chinese entrant into the European market, but with a difference: it's backed by Stellantis, which owns 51% of its export operation and even builds the T03 city car in its plant in Poland for LHD markets. Such integration, it says, means its supply of spare parts will be much more consistent than with other Chinese brands.

That being so, you would expect those ADAS to have undergone some form of testing or for a native English speaker to have looked at the menus and fixed the howlers. Would you like the driver's seat seated or not seated? And would you like the windows on or off?

Stuff like that immediately makes it hard to take a car seriously, but let's try our best here. Leapmotor presents the C10 as a D-segment SUV (think Tesla Model Y) for C-segment money (Hyundai Kona Electric). And at £36,500 with all the kit you could wish for as standard, that checks out at first glance.

Once you've turned all the nonsense off (harder than it should be, but I've experienced worse), it's generally inoffensive. The driving position is sound and the rear seat area is absolutely vast. The interior style is the usual forgettably slick minimalist deal with numerous plastic cows' worth of synthetic leather covering most surfaces, here livened up with a splash of purple. There are nearly no buttons, but the on-touchscreen controls are generally laid out quite sensibly.

The accelerator, regen and brakes are fairly progressive and so is the accurate if lifeless steering. It's surprisingly slow for having 215bhp, but that actually makes it quite relaxing and means there are no traction issues. The slightly soft yet thumpy ride-and-handling compromise stays just the right side of irksome. Efficiency averaged out at 3.4mpkWh on my test drive, if the trip computer is to be believed – pretty decent.

ADAS aside, the C10 commits one big sin: it has neither Apple CarPlay nor Android Auto. You might begrudgingly accept this if the built-in sat-nav and media systems are brilliant, but they're absolutely not.

In short, this is a pretty average car across the board. It's mostly inoffensive, though, so a strong value argument could still save it from oblivion.

Looking at the list price, the Kia EV3 Air costs about the same and gets well over 300 miles from its 81.4kWh battery, trumping the C10's 69.9kWh and 263 miles by a long way. It can charge faster, too, and is easier to use. Sure, it's a physically smaller car, but no less practical in real terms. Its boot is bigger and it has plenty of rear seat space for a couple of adults, whereas you need to be 7ft tall to appreciate the Leapmotor's overabundance of rear leg room. And if the EV3 doesn't take your fancy, there's a queue of other great alternatives, like the Renault Scenic E-Tech and Vauxhall Grandland Electric.

Where the C10 scores is with Leapmotor's PCP offer. With £399 down, you pay £399 a month for four years, which is pretty unbeatable. The shifting sands of monthly finance is a risky place to build your castle, though. The C10 could have used some more compelling features in order to be considered a serious option.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

LEAPMOTOR C10

A blandly inoffensive car that's guilty of a few bad misses. Cheap finance is the main draw

★★★☆☆

Price £36,500
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 215bhp
Torque 236lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 1980kg
0-62mph 7.5sec
Top speed 106mph
Battery 69.9kWh (total and usable)
Range, economy 263 miles, 3.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Kia EV6, Tesla Model Y

TESTER'S NOTE

Leapmotor lets you set up automated 'if-then' functions. You can't get them to deactivate ADAS when you set off, sadly, but you can prank the next driver by using them to crank up the stereo and turn on the reading light when they open a window. Build your own poltergeist. **IV**

TESTER'S NOTE
Configuring a #3 is about as simple as it gets. There are four trim levels – Pro, Pro+, Premium and Brabus – and only one option: a towing package for £1262. **FP**

TESTED 29.1.25, WORCESTERSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

SMART #3 BRABUS

Same crazy power as #1 Brabus. What other tricks does this pony have?

As the mechanical restrictions of internal combustion technology gradually fade away, so too does the novelty of endowing everyday family runarounds with power outputs historically reserved for the most potent of road cars – which is why the 422bhp Smart #3 Brabus isn't as outrageous a proposition as it might have been a few years ago.

At least in potency terms, that is. Some will still find it difficult to reconcile the concept of a fairly chunky crossover bearing a badge previously reserved for some of Europe's very smallest automobiles. But then this is a Brabus edition, of course, and though the #3 is far removed in conception from the hyper-saloons and monster trucks the German tuning firm is best known for, it does at least hold true to the principle of being wildly over-powered – and just a bit silly.

Its racy visual cues signal the addition of a 154bhp motor on the front axle, with the rear keeping the 268bhp unit from the standard #3. Together, they put out more power than a base 911 and an equally hefty 400lb ft of torque for 0-62mph in as little as 3.7sec. See? Silly.

On the more sensible side of things, a 62kWh (usable capacity) battery supplies enough juice for a 258-mile WLTP range and can be charged at a competitive 150kW.

Unlike the #1 Brabus, this second addition to Smart's electric performance ranks does at least get something of a chassis overhaul to support its extra firepower, with the suspension dropped by 35mm and stiffened for a dash more poise and stability. It's not fun, though. Manoeuvrable and confidence-inspiring, sure, but well short on the sort of whimsy and terrier-like naughtiness that we've been pleased to experience in the likes of the far less potent Alpine A290 and Mini Cooper SE EV hot hatches.

Plant the right pedal in Rocket Launch mode and it digs in hard, with little propensity to scrabble and squirm off the line, and then surges forth with an urgency that's initially exhilarating but quickly tiresome – and that, honestly, doesn't feel dramatically different to the still-pokey standard car.

The #3 Brabus is commendably lithe for a car of this weight and size, switching direction assuredly and predictably with scant propensity to break traction or lollop disconcertingly adrift of the apex, which gives you the confidence to let loose when the mood takes you, but it's hamstrung by uncommunicative steering and a point-and-shoot powertrain, making that a vanishingly rare occasion.

It is, though, more comfortable and composed than you might have guessed, to look at its lowered body and thinly shrouded sports wheels. Potholes and rough roads are dispatched quietly and smoothly, and road roar is kept to a minimum at a high-speed cruise, which, together with its comfortable, spacious and well-equipped cabin, would help to sell the #3 Brabus as more a sort of grand touring crossover than a hot hatch – if only it had the legs to match.

Over an hour at motorway speeds I consumed electricity at a rate of 2.88mpkWh – enough for a range of just 179 miles. Admittedly, it was only 5deg C outside, but that's still a good way adrift of this car's official 4.2mpkWh and fairly unimpressive in the context of a segment in which real-world cruising ranges in the mid- to high-250s are attainable for similar money.

Compounding that frustration on the move are the #3's sub-par ergonomics, with not enough buttons for key functions and a touchscreen interface that feels poorly judged and outdated. The menus are illogically arranged and the icons can be tricky to decipher, making it difficult to find your way between climate control and Apple CarPlay or even to adjust the wing mirrors at 70mph, for example, while the #3's cartoon cheetah mascot stands idly – almost mockingly – to the side.

That it's sometimes wearing a parachute for comedic effect is no massive consolation, it must be said.

FELIX PAGE

Go-faster #3 has stiffer suspension and 50:50 weight distribution

Brabus spec adds microfibre seats and wheel, red seatbelts

TECH SPEC

SMART #3 BRABUS

A puzzling and compromised curio that feels like it was conceived mainly to grab headlines
★★★☆☆

Price £46,450
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 422bhp
Torque 400lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 1910kg
0-62mph 3.7sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 66/62kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 258 miles, 4.2mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Cupra Tavascan AWD, Mini Countryman SE All4, Volkswagen ID 5 GTX

TESTED 27.1.25, BERKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** SPRING

PORSCHE TAYCAN GTS

Is this Goldilocks' favourite Taycan?

WOULD YOU FIND 536bhp just a bit too weedy in your electric Porsche but 872bhp excessive? It's mathematically possible, because 336bhp is a big difference, but it's hard to imagine anyone being quite so particular about being pushed back into their seat. Still, the GTS version of the facelifted Taycan is now here to split the difference almost exactly, with 690bhp.

Aside from the power, the GTS can be seen as a greatest hits album compiled from the regular options list: standard kit includes the 18-way adaptive sports seats in Race-Tex microsuede, the Bose sound system, the rear-wheel steering and the rear limited-slip differential.

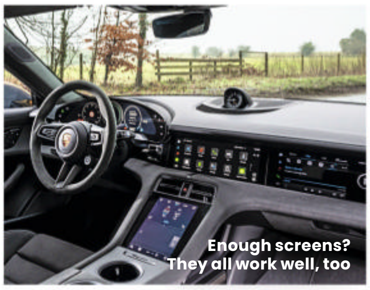
As on other Taycans, air springs are standard and Active Ride (where the suspension is controlled by hydraulics in order to do all sorts of funky stuff like counteract body roll and cancel out bumps) is an option. Whichever you choose, the suspension has a GTS-specific tune.

We're talking about pretty incremental changes here, though. Our test car had the active suspension, and when you leave it in Comfort mode, there's no suggestion that this version is the sporty one. There's a bit of surface patter, but the smoothness of the long-wave ride boggles the mind. It's eerily smooth.

Twist the steering wheel-mounted drive mode dial to Sport and it becomes one of the sharpest, most interactive EVs you can buy. Better than another Taycan? Without driving different versions back to back, it's almost impossible to say.

Fast? Yes, very. Even more so when you remember to press the push-to-pass button on the wheel.

Inside, our test car had the GTS-specific Race-Tex interior in Slate Grey. The geometric pattern on the seats is neat, but the omnipresence of grey is rather overwhelming. You can have leather if you prefer.



Enough screens? They all work well, too

One other element that's unique to the GTS is that you can specify paddles for the regen. Our test car didn't have them, though.

A few years ago, when the 718 Cayman range was at its most expansive (fewer versions are available now as production is winding down), the GTS gave you the best engine with the best chassis before you step up to the unobtainium GT cars. The Taycan GTS feels like a model strategy by numbers. There was a gap between the 4S and the Turbo and this fills it. In isolation, it's very good, but the added value is dubious.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

PORSCHE TAYCAN GTS SPORT TURISMO

The facelifted Taycan is great to drive, with a long range and rapid charging. The GTS doesn't change that – for better or for worse

★★★★☆

Price £118,300
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 690bhp
Torque 583lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear (front), 2-spd automatic (rear), 4WD
Kerb weight 2310kg
0-62mph 3.3sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 105/97kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 373 miles, 3.7mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals BMW i5 M60 Touring, Audi S6 Avant

TESTED 29.1.25, WARWICKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

GWM ORA 03 GT

Funky Cat dressed as a hot hatch

DON'T BE DECEIVED by the jazzy bumpers, racy alloys and GT badging: Great Wall Motor has not made an Alpine A290 rival.

This is the new top-rung version of the GWM Ora 03 (formerly the Ora Funky Cat), and while it might look every inch the hot hatch hero, it's not trying to trouble the podium at a future running of our Britain's Best Driver's Car showdown.

This £32,995 range-topper is more of a GT-Line than a true GT, distinguished from other flavours of Ora 03 largely by the extra kit it comes with: panoramic roof, heat pump, massaging front seats and those bespoke alloys.

It comes as standard with the 63kWh battery that also powers the mid-rung Pro car, at £28,995, while the entry-level Pure gets a 48kWh battery for £24,995.

The new three-pronged line-up has been introduced as part of a bid to widen this electric hatchback's appeal and help it better compete in an increasingly busy field.

Fundamentally, though, this left-field choice is unchanged, having received a bigger battery and much-needed smartphone mirroring in a facelift a while back.

So it still puts 169bhp through the front wheels, gets from 0-62mph in 8.3sec and musters an agreeable official range of 261 miles.

It's also still commendably refined for its size and, certainly in the case of the GT, highly specified for the price.

But there are some areas in which this car has always fallen short, and they really needed to be addressed to properly bolster its appeal. The touchscreen infotainment is still fussy and fairly crude (it completely crashed at one point on our test run), the chatbot remains irritating and unhelpful, and the physical switchgear is neither prevalent enough nor of sufficiently high quality to sell GWM's vision of Ora appealing as a fashion-focused sub-brand.

GT gets massaging front seats and a panoramic roof

It's disappointing, too, that GWM hasn't sought to boost the Ora 03's maximum charge speed of 64kW (even the Citroën e-C3 and Fiat Grande Panda manage 100kW) or tweak the traction control to make the front wheels less prone to spinning up off the mark.

And it would have been nice if the GT's sporting-inspired makeover had extended to a meatier steering wheel and a more communicative front axle, at least.

Still, even after losing the Funky Cat name, the Ora 03 stands out as a charismatic and attractively priced alternative to the segment stalwarts, and its competitive range and kit levels could be enough for some to compensate for its dynamic and ergonomic shortcomings.

FELIX PAGE

TECH SPEC

GWM ORA 03 GT

New top-link trim adds some visual cachet but can't make up for lacklustre chassis and tech

★★★☆☆

Price £32,995
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 169bhp
Torque 184lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1580kg
0-62mph 8.3sec
Top speed 99mph
Battery 63/59kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 261 miles, 4.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals BYD Dolphin, MG 4 EV, Smart #1

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5727

PORSCHE MACAN ELECTRIC

Can the Macan retain its prized driver’s SUV status in electric guise?

MODEL TESTED
PORSCHE MACAN TURBO ELECTRIC
Price £96,900
Power 576bhp (630bhp with launch control)
Torque 811lb ft (833lb ft with launch control)
0-60mph 3.0sec
30-70mph 2.5sec
Top speed 162mph (claimed)
Average economy 2.3mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 197kW
CO_2 emissions 0g/km
70-0mph 48.5m (3deg C, dry)

Throughout its history, Porsche has been an expert at taking platforms and components from the wider Volkswagen and Audi family and imbuing them with a certain magic that no one else can replicate. The original Porsche, the 356, has its roots in the Beetle, and the Porsche 968 Clubsport goes back to the 924, which was intended as a VW with an Audi-derived engine.

One of Zuffenhausen's biggest commercial successes, the Macan, was loosely based on the Audi Q5 but reached heights of driver appeal the latter car could only dream of.

For the new and electric-only Macan, Porsche isn't waiting around, and played an integral part from the start in developing the new Premium Platform Electric (PPE) architecture together with Audi.

As the second-generation Macan takes over from the first with a short period of overlap in their production runs, it has quite a job on its hands. For the Macan Electric to maintain its petrol predecessor's hard-won success will be a big challenge.

That will come down to the sales results. In this road test, it will need to prove it's a real Porsche, one that's distinct from its Audi Q6 E-tron sibling model. We're testing the range-topping 630bhp Macan Turbo.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★½

PROS Looks like a Porsche; 800V architecture and fast charging
CONS Lack of ICE Macan successor will leave many buyers in the cold

Porsche could have hedged its bets with parallel electric and piston lines, like with the Volkswagen ID 3 and Golf. Instead, this Macan EV will go at it alone when the petrol car goes out of production next year. Or at least that was the strategy. The old petrol Macan remains in production for now, even if you can no longer buy one in Europe, and there are reports that Porsche may be reconsidering its choices in light of slowing Taycan sales.

With this bold direction comes a bold new platform. The PPE was developed together with Audi to underpin a new generation of EVs. To deliver the long ranges that customers will expect, it accepts very large battery packs (100kWh in the Macan) and uses 800V to allow very fast charging of up to 270kW.

Plenty of chargers still run on just 400V, so to mitigate against that, the PPE uses 'bank charging', where the car essentially splits its 100kWh battery into two 50kWh packs, charging each half at 135kW.

Mk1 became a huge seller for Porsche

Elsewhere, the Macan Electric deploys Porsche's Integrated Power Box. This combines the on-board AC charger, high-voltage heater and 12V DC-to-DC converter into one 19kg package squeezed between the rear seats and the battery below, freeing up space for a front luggage compartment.

Porsche says that it has also focused on repairability – increasingly a point of contention with EVs. The battery consists of 12 modules. These and other important components can be replaced individually if necessary.

Since the typical Porsche design cues still hark back in some way to air-cooled 911s, with a short bonnet and limited front air intakes, they lend themselves well to EVs, including the Macan. The typical 'tunnels' that lead from the headlights to the windscreen are present and correct, and because you can see the edges of the bonnet from the driver's seat, they make the Macan easier to place on the road than the Audi Q6 E-tron, despite similar dimensions.

INTERIOR

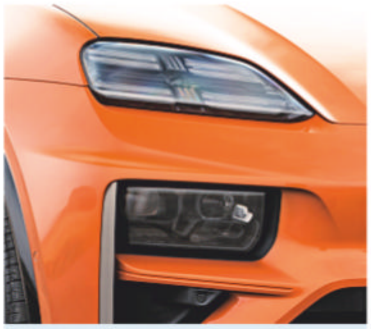
★★★★☆

PROS Very different from related Q6 E-tron; excellent driving position; good mix of screen-based and physical controls; fairly practical
CONS Some disappointing materials

Platform-sharing can make the interiors of different cars look and feel disappointingly similar – take the Volkswagen Group MEB models and the various Stellantis cars. This is clearly something Porsche and Audi have aimed to avoid. The eagle-eyed might spot that the Macan and Q6 share their column stalks, their pedals and their placement, and their sporting and multi-adjustable driving positions, but that's about it.

Although the Macan has just as much overall screen acreage as the Q6, digital technology hasn't likewise been put front and centre in quite the same way. The central infotainment touchscreen is neatly integrated into the dashboard rather than being perched on top. Lower down, there's also a panel with some physical switches. The knurled rocker switches for the temperature and fan speed feel good, but when you press the buttons (such as for the heated seats), you move the entire gloss black plastic panel and leave fingerprints.

Overall perceived quality is a slightly mixed bag. The leather-covered surfaces (some of which are optional) and the switches for the windows, gear selector and those on the steering wheel feel appropriately high-quality. Some of the plastics in the centre console don't live up to the £100,000-plus price that a Macan can easily reach, and the big expanse of gloss black plastic in front of the passenger (which can optionally be filled by an additional touchscreen) looks rather plain. As usual with a Porsche, there is enormous scope for personalisation, with lighter colours, wood trim, extended leather covering up some of the plain plastics and different types of seats and steering wheels all on the menu.



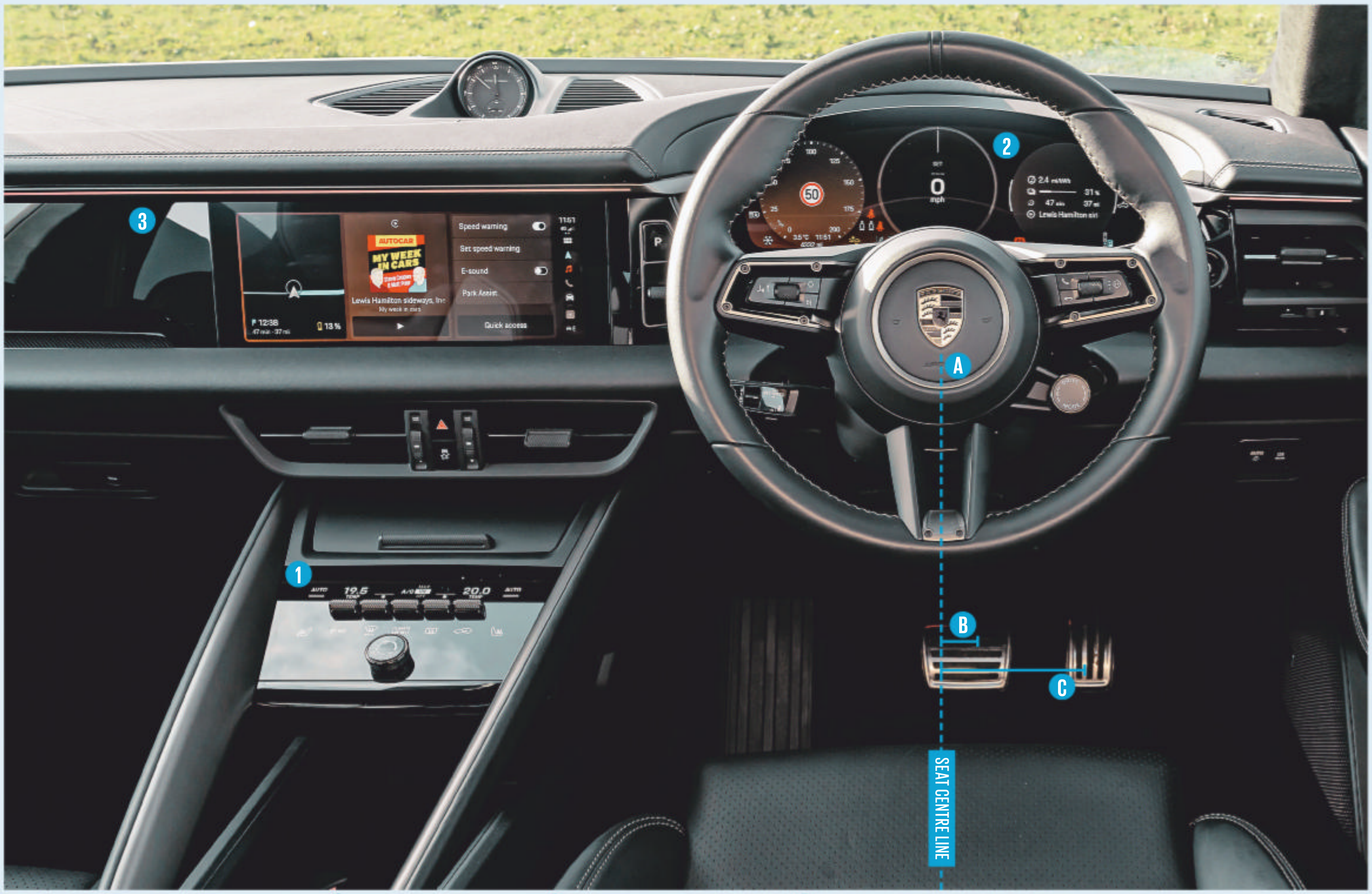
■ What looks like the main part of the headlight is actually just the daytime-running light, while the dipped and high beams are in the lower cluster. Matrix LEDs are powerful, but the adaptive function works only above about 40mph, which isn't ideal on rural roads.

■ Google-based infotainment system has an app store that includes third-party apps, as well as YouTube, so you can watch the video review of your car in your car. It turns off on the move. The Taycan's electronically controlled air vents have not been adopted.

Also very Porsche-typical is that the ergonomics and usability are carefully considered. More buttons would naturally be a good thing, but the Macan strikes a pleasing balance, with up-to-date digital tech that works well, and plenty of physical controls for frequently used functions, including toggling various ADAS functions. Likewise, the driving position is excellent, with a very generous range of adjustment in the steering column and seat height.

The amount of space available in the Macan is slightly less than in the Audi Q6. There's just as much leg room as in the Genesis GV60, a little less than in the Polestar 3, but rear passengers have no cause for complaint, with a comfortable seating position. Again, that's assuming the buyer has ticked the right option boxes, since separate ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON



① The least pleasing materials are found in the centre console, with a mix of satin and gloss black plastics. Lower storage levels and USB ports can be hard to access too.

② Fully digital instrument cluster is one of the best around, with clear graphics in unmistakable Porsche style and a good amount of configuration freedom.

③ This slab of gloss black plastic and the piece of trim underneath can be replaced with a 10.9in display for £1112, letting the passenger stream media and control the navigation.

WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 40mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 190mm right. Porsche does driving positions very well. There's generous steering column adjustment, and you can sit low or high. Small steering wheel can cut off part of the gauges.

◂ rear climate control and rear heated seats are not standard.

Boot space is class-typical, with an even shape and a good selection of hooks and levers. Porsche has done well to include a frunk that will swallow the charge cable and a small bag, and it can be opened via a button on the key, so you needn't fumble for a physical release.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★★⯪

PROS Logical and responsive; good smartphone integration and app; excellent hi-fi
CONS Charging planner nowhere near Tesla's; few physical controls

The bones of the Macan's infotainment system are another thing shared with its Audi sibling. Just like the Q6's system (and those used by Renault and Volvo), it runs on Android Automotive. You could never tell by looking at it, mind. This is a flexible architecture and, apart from a few minimal differences, the interface in the Macan looks and functions just like the Porsche-exclusive system in the Taycan.

It works quickly, there's a permanent shortcut bar and Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are well integrated into the native system. The smartphone app is fairly full-featured and intuitive too. Our test car was fitted with the mid-spec Bose hi-fi system, which was outstanding, with unusually clear instrument separation.

The Google-based navigation is clear, well informed of traffic and lets you customise your route. It can plan a route via rapid chargers, but if this option is turned on, it won't explicitly tell you it has added a charging stop and will sometimes use notoriously unreliable networks that an experienced EV driver would know to avoid.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Regen is intuitive and has a freewheeling mode; incredibly fast
CONS No one-pedal drive mode; performance degradation at low state of charge

Porsche has a habit of doing more with less, and so it proves with the electric Macan Turbo. A power output of 576bhp (630bhp with launch control) is an enormous amount, but it is outgunned by the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N (641bhp on overboost) and the Mercedes-AMG EQE 53 SUV (617bhp). Nevertheless, if you want the fastest electric SUV (short of the left-hand-drive-only Tesla Model X Plaid) in the UK, this is it.

Despite cold conditions, our test car exploded to 60mph in 3.0sec, half a second faster than the Ioniq 5 N, and it doesn't let up at autobahn speeds, maintaining its lead over the Ioniq all the way, and even reaching its 162mph limiter before the end of Horiba MIRA's mile straight. In a weird way, it doesn't feel quite as spectacular as the numbers suggest, but that's more thanks to the unimpeachable control than any lack of thrust.

It was somewhat surprising, then, that the Macan lost a lot of performance when its battery had drained to below 10% of charge. During the first run at around 6% remaining, it was a full three seconds slower to 60mph. For the return run, at 4%, the tortoise icon appeared on the dash and added another 0.2sec. While it managed 100mph on the first run, it struggled to do 80mph on the return.

Porsche has a firm philosophy when it comes to regenerative braking: it doesn't believe in one-pedal driving. If you agree, you will find the Macan very intuitive to drive, because as standard it freewheels when you release the accelerator, and the 'high-regen' mode is still very mild. However, it's disappointing that the brake pedal feel, while better than on the Taycan, is not as reassuringly firm and predictable as on the best EVs, and that drivers who do enjoy one-pedal driving are simply ignored.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★☆☆

PROS Strong grip in the dry; rear limited-slip differential as standard; quiet at a cruise
CONS Lacks feel, progression and involvement, particularly in suboptimal conditions; busy ride

Rarely has the importance of tyres become more evident than during our road test of the Macan Turbo Electric. Conditions were not ideal, with temperatures generally between freezing and 5deg C, accompanied by the usual winter damp. Porsche GB supplies its press cars on summer tyres – Pirelli

P Zero PZ4 in the case of the orange car we spent most of the week with – but the inevitable lack of grip is something we can normally set aside in our evaluation when a car still behaves predictably.

Whenever the road surface is anything other than bone-dry, neither the ride nor the handling is up to the standards we are used to with Porsches. Low grip conspires with an over-active (optional) rear-wheel steering system and a four-wheel drive system that's somewhat unpredictable in its torque distribution to create a car that inspires little confidence.

Although the steering has the usual uncorrupted, smooth feel typical of Porsches, it doesn't have the feedback that normally comes with it. Meanwhile, the rear-wheel steering tends to counter-steer too much at medium speeds, resulting in slightly nervous responses. In combination with the lack of steering feedback, this makes it easy to overload the front axle and find the Macan washing into understeer.

Matters are not helped by the enormous amount of power, which makes it easy to break traction at either axle. The Porsche Stability Management (PSM) ensures things never get out of hand, but the car doesn't reassure its driver that it will go where it's pointed, even if it probably will.

With the PSM switched off on MIRA's wet handling track, the Macan was downright unpredictable – sometimes gripping, sometimes understeering, sometimes snapping into oversteer, but never signalling clearly which it was going to be. Things were better on the dry handling course, where the handling became more precise, and the car could be drifted through the hairpins. However, it lacked the sweet balance of even the standard Audi Q6 E-tron Quattro, and there was always a great sense of weight when turning in to corners.

You wouldn't call this car fun to drive, then. The trouble is that the ride isn't great either. The Macan Turbo Electric has adaptively damped air suspension as standard, but on bumpy roads it suffers from an excessive amount of pitch and head toss, as if the individual wheels never quite move independently.

The secondary ride is quite average as well. It feels fundamentally stiff-legged, and the 22in wheels of our test car (20in is standard) thunked through potholes and over corrugations.

This behaviour is so out of character for a Porsche that we suspected something might be wrong with our particular car and asked the press office if we could try its other Macan Turbo Electric, which is mechanically identical apart from running on Goodyear Eagle F1 Supersport tyres in exactly the same size. Whether a car wears one of these tyres or a Bridgestone Potenza Sport is largely chance.

Based on a short back-to-back drive, the car was improved. Grip levels were noticeably higher and the steering feel was better, which inspired more confidence and seemed to calm the car's various systems down. When grip ran out (these are still summer tyres in suboptimal conditions), it did so more gradually. The ride over low-amplitude, high-frequency imperfections improved a tad too.

Some fundamental issues remain. The primary ride isn't affected by the tyres, and the rear-wheel steering and four-wheel drive lack the transparency of the best such systems.

Despite running on the same Pirelli tyres, albeit a different size, we found the Macan 4 we tested (on steel springs with adaptive dampers and standard steering) to be miles ahead of the Turbos for involvement, with more communicative steering and a more predictable handling balance that was mostly sure-footed but allowed some throttle-adjustability when pushed. On its smaller wheels, it had a better secondary ride, but still quite a busy primary one.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★½☆

PROS Competitive pricing; scope for personalisation; DC charge speed

CONS Poor efficiency and range

At the time of publication, the Macan range included a single-motor car called simply 'Macan' as well as three dual-motor versions: the 4, 4S and Turbo. It would be a safe bet that other versions, such as a GTS and a Turbo S, will follow. With such a wide variety of powertrain variations and Porsche's sprawling options list, there is a wide gulf between the cheapest and most expensive Macans. A single-motor Macan costs £68,500, rising to £96,900 for the Turbo.

Go wild with the options, and it's possible to add £30,000 to that. While that seems a lot, it simply reflects the additional scope for personalisation that Porsche offers. As standard, the Macan is rather sparsely equipped, but also undercuts most rivals. Instead of a one-size-fits-all trim level structure, you add the various options yourself.

We were rather disappointed with the Macan Turbo Electric's energy efficiency. Over the course of our test, we rarely saw over 2.5mpkWh. Based on our overall average of 2.3mpkWh, the Turbo Electric has a winter range of just 219 miles.

It's a good thing, then, that it does charge very rapidly indeed. Since it shares its battery and peak charging speed with the Audi Q6 E-tron, we expected their performances to be nearly identical. Instead, the Macan managed to maintain over 200kW for much longer, resulting in the third-highest weighted average speed we have ever tested, behind two versions of the Taycan. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 1070mm. Turbo gets the excellent 18-way adjustable Adaptive Sports Seats as standard.

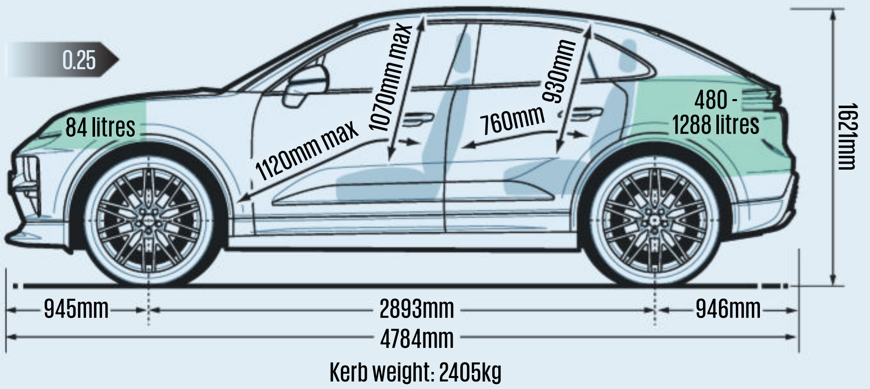
REAR Leg room 760mm, head room 930mm. Despite the sloping roofline, rear passengers aren't short on space. Rear climate controls are optional.

BOOT Length 900-1710mm, width 1060-1410mm, height 460-675mm. Underfloor storage is taken up by a subwoofer, but there is an 84-litre frunk.

"Neither the ride nor the handling is up to Porsche standards"

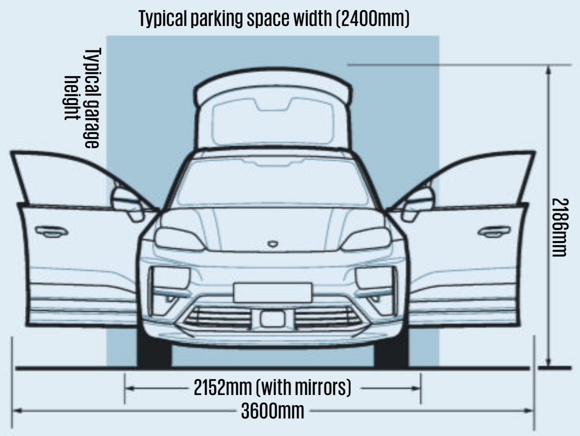
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS


0.25
84 litres
1120mm max
1070mm max
760mm
930mm
480 - 1288 litres
1621mm
945mm
2893mm
946mm
4784mm

Kerb weight: 2405kg

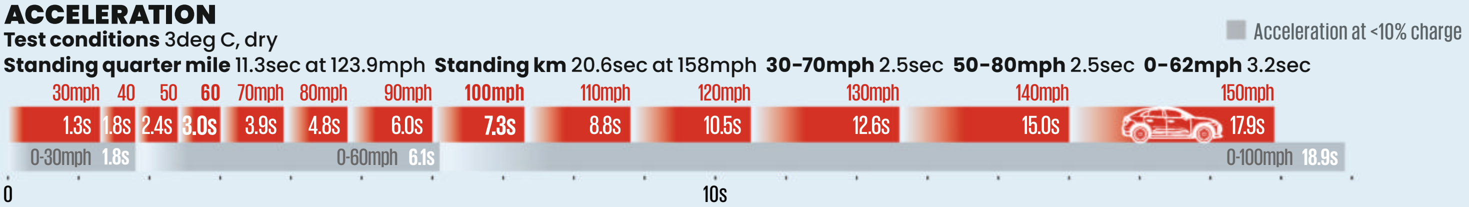
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2186mm
2152mm (with mirrors)
3600mm

ACCELERATION

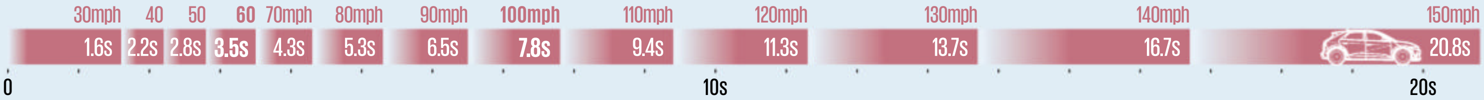
Test conditions 3deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 11.3sec at 123.9mph **Standing km** 20.6sec at 158mph **30-70mph** 2.5sec **50-80mph** 2.5sec **0-62mph** 3.2sec



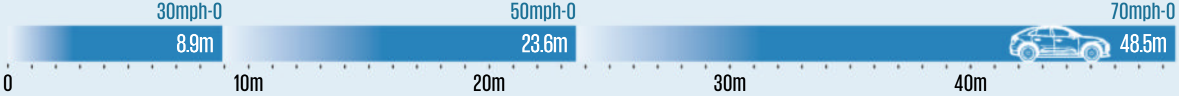
Hyundai Ioniq 5 N (2024, 22deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 11.7sec at 122mph **Standing km** 21.4sec at 151.4mph **30-70mph** 2.7sec **50-80mph** 2.6sec **0-62mph** na

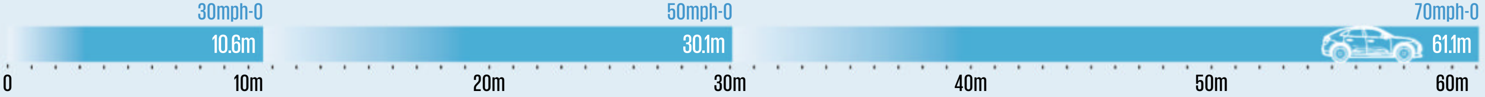


BRAKING

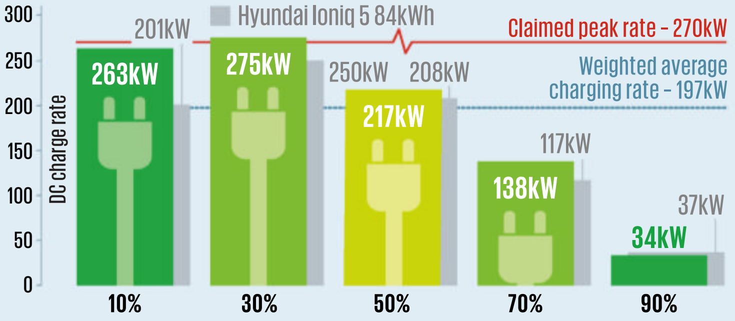
Dry 60-0mph 2.78sec



Wet 60-0mph 3.49sec

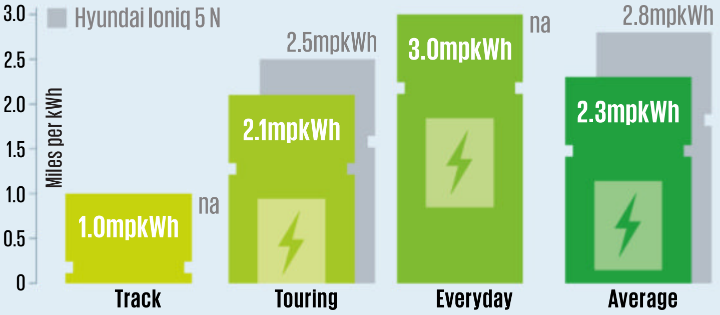


RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

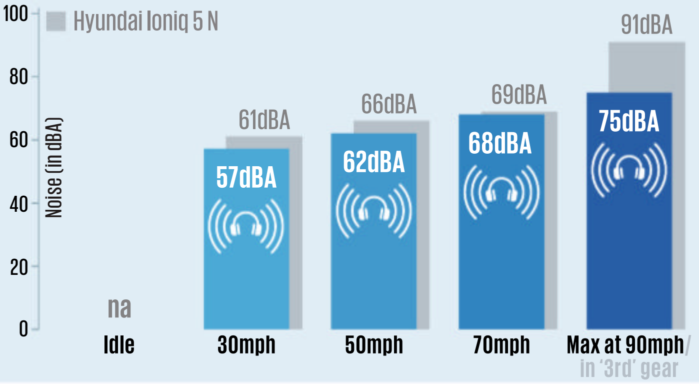


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 340 miles, 3.1mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 219/200/285 miles (average/touring/everyday)

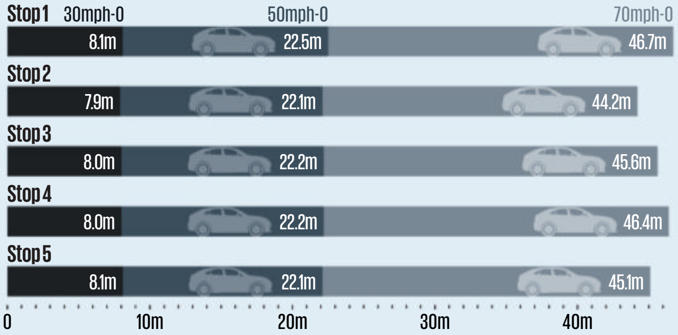


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -1.6m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the Macan Turbo Electric, contact Porsche Customer Relations Hub, Porsche Cars Great Britain, Bath Road, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SE (03457 911 911, porsche.com/uk).

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

PORSCHE MACAN TURBO ELECTRIC

On-the-road price £96,900
Price as tested £108,079
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £50,525
Contract hire £1501 pcm (£9006 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £1420 pcm (£16,200 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Insurance group 50

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Adaptive air suspension, matrix LED headlights, electrically adjustable, heated leather seats, Bose hi-fi, Porsche Torque Vectoring rear limited-slip differential
Selected options 22in 'Spyder Design' wheels £2741, rear-axle steering £1445, adaptive cruise £509
Also available Thermally and noise-insulating glass £788, keyless entry £722, four-zone climate control £333

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Front and rear, transverse, 4WD
Type Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 630bhp (launch control)
Torque 833lb ft (launch control)
Maximum regen capacity 240kW
Battery type NMC
Capacity 95.0/100.0kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 800V
Power to weight 240bhp per tonne*
Torque to weight 337lb ft per tonne*
*Based on continuous output

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 9.2:1 (f), 9.0:1 (r)
mph per 1000rpm 9.7 (f), 9.9 (r)
Motor rpm at 70/80mph 7194/8222 (f), 7038/8043 (r)

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 2405kg/na
Drag coefficient 0.25
Wheels 7.5Jx22in (f), 10.0Jx22in (r)
Tyres 255/40 R22 103Y XL (f), 295/35 R22 108Y XL (r), Pirelli P Zero PZ4 Elect NE0 **Spare** None (mobility kit)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front and rear Multi-link, two-chamber air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, variable-ratio rack and pinion, plus rear-axle steering; 2.3 turns lock to lock; 11.1m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 400mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 350mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, via switch

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2025) Adult occupant 90%, child occupant 90%, vulnerable road users 83%, safety assist 78%

VERDICT

Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech

★★★⯪☆

If you take one thing away from this road test, let it be that the Macan 4 Electric is a much better car than the top-rung Macan Turbo Electric in nearly every way. All Macans share an appealing cabin, rapid charging and ample performance, but the cheaper car shines with its handling and range.

In itself, that's not a surprising conclusion, since so far only Hyundai has truly managed to give the sporty version of its mainstream EV a clear USP.

However, we hadn't expected the gulf between Macans to be this wide. The Turbo's performance is impressive but largely irrelevant on the road, and the penalty it wreaks on energy efficiency and therefore range is not compensated by added involvement. Meanwhile, the air suspension and four-wheel steering don't deliver an especially appealing or intuitive ride and handling balance.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
Few cars are as spec-dependent as a Porsche, and this Macan in particular. I imagine a single-motor car or a Macan 4, with coil springs and adaptive dampers, but without rear-wheel steering, would be a very appealing sporty electric SUV. Winter or all-season tyres would still be a good investment for the cold months, though.

RICHARD LANE
A bit of synthesised noise can do wonders for involvement in an EV, but Porsche's 'Sport Sound', which turns on automatically in Sport mode, is too much.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Tune the rear-wheel steering to be more transparent, like in other Porsches.
- Improve the energy efficiency and range.
- Retune the air suspension for more compliance, or offer the Active Ride system.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	
	HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N Rewrote the book on how much fun an electric SUV can be. Not as luxurious as the Macan, but still a practical family car.	**POLESTAR 3 LONG RANGE DUAL MOTOR PERFORMANCE** Uses less tech to be more of a driver's car. Poor control layout, ADAS and efficiency.	**GENESIS ELECTRIFIED GV70** Pleasingly alternative take on the compact electric SUV. Fast but more luxurious than sporty.	**AUDI SQ6 E-TRON** S version feels more like a trim level than a performance version. More techy, but surprisingly good to drive.	**PORSCHE MACAN TURBO ELECTRIC**	**BMW iX M70** We have not driven the facelifted version of BMW's electric flagship SUV. The pre-facelift one was surprisingly wafty.
	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆		
Price	£65,000	£81,500	£65,105	£93,675		£114,205
Power, torque	641bhp, 549lb ft	510bhp, 671lb ft	483bhp, 516lb ft	510bhp, 631lb ft		650bhp, 749lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	3.4sec, 161mph	4.7sec, 130mph	4.2sec, 146mph	4.4sec, 142mph		3.8sec, 155mph
Range, economy	278 miles, 2.9mpkWh	360 miles, 2.8mpkWh	283 miles, 3.2mpkWh	360 miles, 3.5mpkWh		365 miles, 3.0mpkWh

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5728**

MAZDA CX-30

‘No replacement for displacement’ is the thinking behind this small SUV

Volume car makers no longer seem to believe that bigger-capacity combustion engines have any place in smaller cars. Save, perhaps, for one.

Always an advocate of a sophisticated, multi-solution approach to decarbonisation, Mazda has been quietly running in the opposite direction to many of its peers when it comes to powertrain strategy. In 2022, it introduced a medium-sized SUV, the CX-60, with a brand-new, six-cylinder turbo diesel engine. And the same year, when rivals were announcing three-cylinder turbo alternatives, it added a 2.5-litre four-cylinder atmospheric petrol option to its big-selling CX-5.

Now, as part of a continued initiative of ‘engine right-sizing’, it has replaced a 2.0-litre unit with that same 2.5 in the nose of both the Mazda 3 hatchback and the closely related CX-30 crossover.

It’s the latter we’re looking at here, a car that has also just had some minor equipment upgrades for 2025. Can it possibly make sense to continue to ignore forced induction, then, and go large on cubic capacity in a car like this?

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Looks smart; weighs less than 1500kg; hybrid and cylinder deactivation tech mitigate the thirst of a bigger engine

CONS Small Mazdas no longer get independent rear suspension

First appearing back in 2019, the CX-30 remains Mazda’s attempt at an ideal-sized crossover hatchback. It was developed alongside the current-generation Mazda 3 hatchback that appeared in the same year and is 4.4 metres long, with a fairly low-rise body profile by class standards. So, while it certainly belongs somewhere in Europe’s busy C-SUV segment, it’s not easy to define as a modern SUV. There is a clear sense of visual lightness about it that, more than one tester thought, clothes the space and versatility it offers rather neatly.

The car uses Mazda’s all-steel Skyactiv Small model platform and has class-typical independent front suspension and a torsion beam rear. A choice of transverse-mounted, four-cylinder petrol engines drive the front axle via either six-speed manual or automatic gearboxes, although an electronically controlled i-AWD part-time four-wheel drive system is available with the upper-tier 2.0-litre engine.

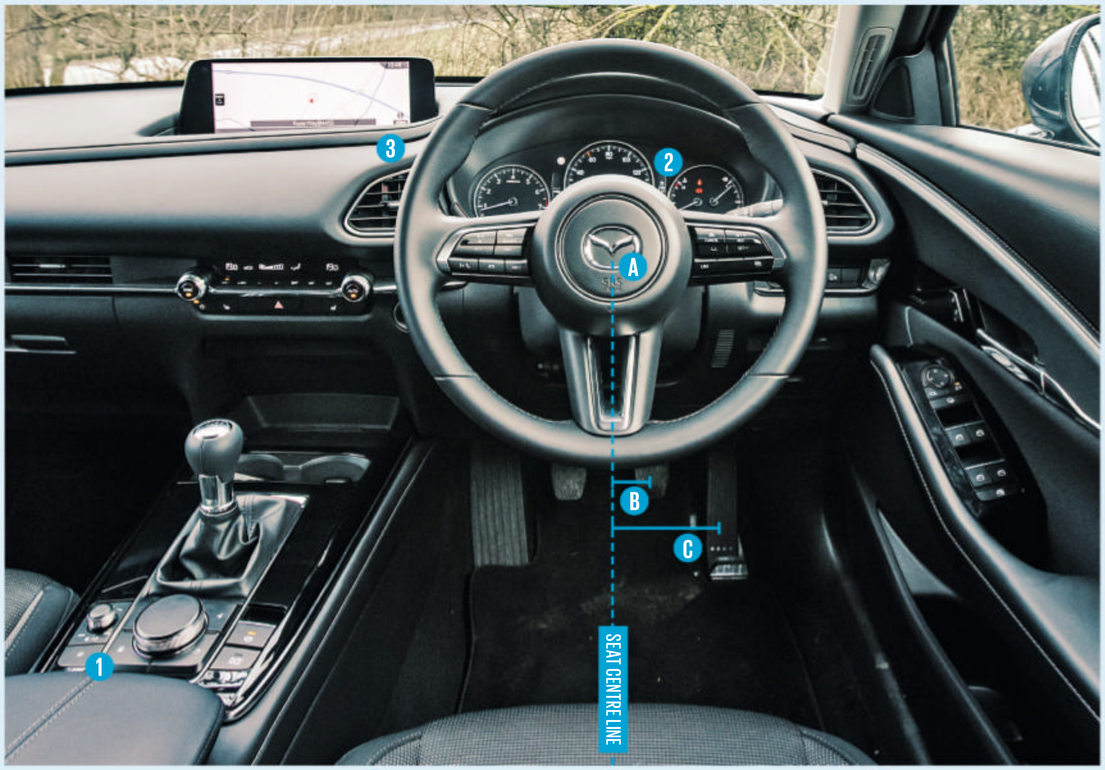
It’s the new lower-tier engine we’re interested in now. In place of the CX-30’s old entry-level 121bhp 2.0-litre e-Skyactiv G unit comes the firm’s naturally aspirated 2.5 petrol four, producing 138bhp at 5000rpm, as well as about 10% more peak torque (176lb ft) than the engine it replaces, served 700rpm lower.

MODEL TESTED
MAZDA CX-30
2.5 E-SKYACTIVE G
EXCLUSIVE-LINE
Price £29,165
Power 138bhp at 5000rpm
Torque 176lb ft at 3300rpm
0-60mph 7.6sec
30-70mph 7.6sec
Top speed 121mph (claimed)
Average economy 40.3mpg
Electric range na
CO_2 emissions 136g/km
70-0mph 46.3m (4deg C, damp)

① On a fascia retaining plenty of physical switchgear, this user-configurable star button would be more useful if you could assign a wider range of functions to it.

② Instrumentation is mostly analogue, and superbly clear and readable, although there are digital gauges within it whose content you can tailor to your preference.

③ Asymmetrical upper dash seems to wrap around the driver agreeably, and you can have the contrasting section in 'rich brown' leather on upper-tier models.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 65mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 180mm right. Pedal layout and steering column positioning are beyond reproach.

Bigger cylinders, claims Mazda, allow for cooler average combustion temperatures and more efficient combustion control. Still, the 2.5 does not adopt the SCCI combustion control technology of the more powerful 2.0-litre e-Skyactiv X, but it does feature 24V mild-hybrid assistance, as well as active cylinder shutdown technology that enables it to run as an effective 1.3-litre twin during lean-burn cruising.

INTERIOR

★★★★½

PROS Great tactile quality; fine driving position; every physical switch you could want
CONS Second row and boot don't go far beyond big supermini territory

There is little sense of a raised driving position at the wheel, or of a high roofline above your head. As it does from without, the car gives the impression that it's simply a more practically minded five-door hatchback. It has a good-sized boot, a comfortable and spacious front row, and back seats that are fine for children and smaller adults but still not a match for cars like the Honda Civic or Skoda Octavia, never mind a Nissan Qashqai. It's aiming to be "just enough car" – and, for younger families or empty-nesters, it might well be.

Our test car's cabin had quite a dark, business-like ambience underlining a pervasive impression of good tactile material quality, and thoroughly well-conceived ease of use. This isn't an interior that gives touchscreen technology primacy. Permanent physical controls are retained for heating and ventilation, for the audio system and for navigating the infotainment system (which is one of the few left on the market that can't be operated on a touchscreen basis). To the right of the steering wheel are physical buttons to quickly and easily deactivate the engine stop-start system, traction control, parking sensors and some of the ADAS functions.

It's to Mazda's considerable credit how much attention to detail has gone into the clarity and readability of the car's analogue instruments, and the provision and location of all of its secondary controls, but also how hefty and expensive they feel. There's tangible quality to the haptic feedback of the indicator and wiper control stalks, for example – a relaxing sensory appeal, even, about the softened tick of those indicators. It's all a little reminiscent of the way noughties-era Volkswagens once felt.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★★½

PROS Clearly rendered, simple and undistracting; rotary input device makes it easy to interact with while driving
CONS Plenty of sub-menus to wade through

The CX-30's 10.3in multimedia screen is unlike the vast majority of similar systems because it's controlled entirely via the rotary 'commander' positioned on the centre console. This might feel to some like antiquated technology, but soon enough you learn to embrace the control philosophy, which allows you to navigate the systems menus easily, without stretching an arm to hit fiddly screen icons, and without distraction from the road for more than a second's glance at a time.

The system isn't as stacked with networked features or streaming options as some, but it's easy to use, it covers all the important ▸

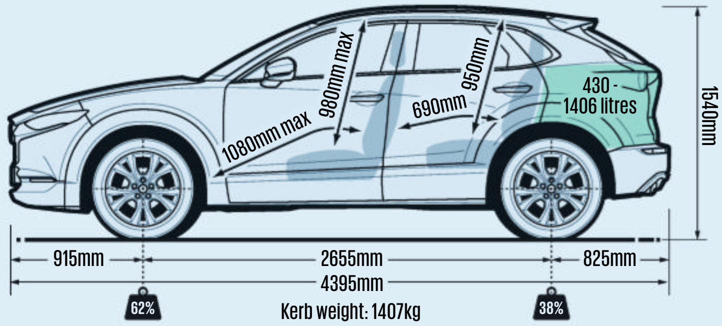
■ The curves in the flanks are intended to build the sense of speed the CX-30 commands as it moves. Reason enough, maybe, for that extra regular visit to the jet wash.

■ These 18in wheels are as big as they get, but alternative designs and paint finishes are offered. You can get 16in alloys – and tyres with a 65-aspect sidewall – on entry-level cars.

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

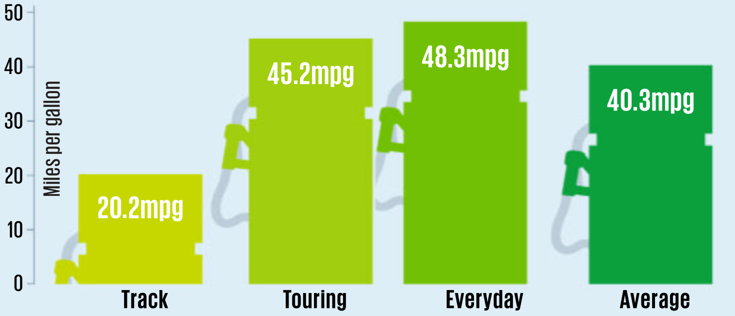
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS



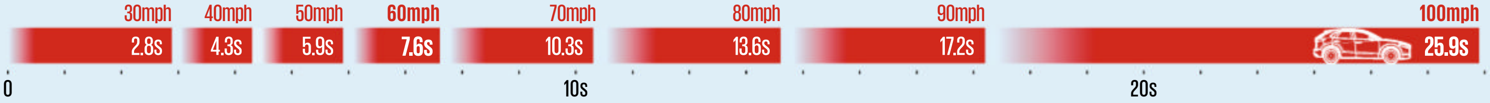
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 47.1mpg (combined) **Test range** 452/507/541 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** na



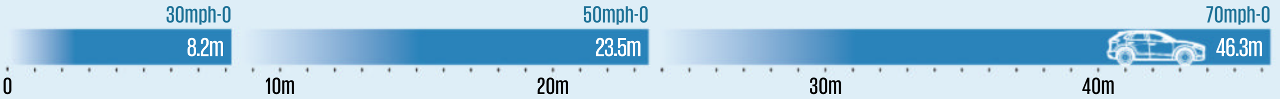
ACCELERATION

Test conditions 4deg C, damp
Standing quarter mile 16.1sec at 88.4mph **Standing km** na **30-70mph** 7.6sec **30-70mph in fourth** 13.7sec **0-62mph** 8.0sec

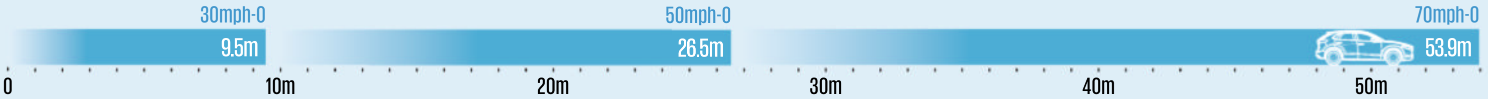


BRAKING

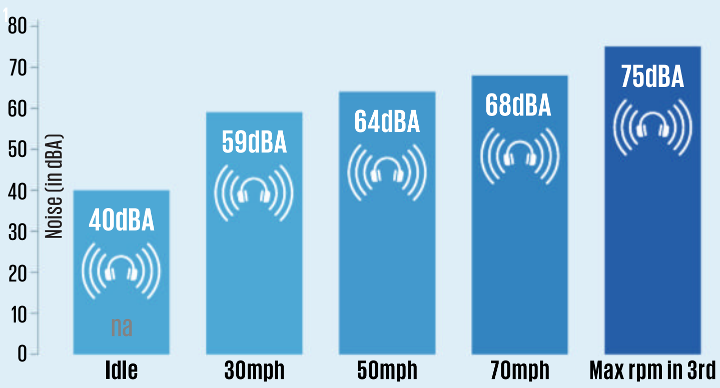
Dry 60-0mph 2.50sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.86sec



CABIN NOISE



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MAZDA CX-30 2.5 E-SKYACTIV G EXCLUSIVE-LINE

On-the-road price £29,165
Price as tested £29,765
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £12,675
Insurance group 16

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, transverse, FWD
Type 4 cyls in line, 2488cc, petrol, plus 24V ISG
Battery 0.22kWh (total)
Total power 138bhp at 5000rpm
Total torque 176lb ft at 3300rpm
Power to weight 98bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 125lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 6-spd manual

rpm in top gear at 70/80mph 2256/2578

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1407kg/1422kg
Wheels 7.0Jx18in **Tyres** 215/55 R18 95H, Bridgestone Turanza T005A

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Torsion beam, trailing arms, coil springs
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.8 turns lock to lock; 11.4m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 295mm ventilated discs
Rear 265mm solid discs

For information on the CX-30, contact Mazda Motors UK, Victory Way, Crossways Business Park, Dartford, DA2 6DT (03457 484848, mazda.co.uk)

> **"It's like an avowal to engage the driver from minute one"**

PETER LIDDIARD

◂ functions, and some remote controls are available through the MyMazda smartphone app, through which you can send destinations to the sat-nav in advance.

Wireless smartphone mirroring for both Apple and Android devices is standard, as is wireless charging.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Smooth and refined; plenty of accessible torque
CONS Not keen on high revs; hybrid system's boost is short-lived

It's not that long ago that volume-selling family cars with bigger four-cylinder petrol engines were common in the UK. They were typically quite noisy and coarse, however – unlike this CX-30.

Helped no doubt by its 24V hybrid system, Mazda's 2.5-litre engine is remarkably smooth and quiet in normal operating conditions. There's no sense of commotion when ushered into life, or from it, and apart from the faintest rough edge under bigger throttle loads, as well as the raised noise levels you would expect at high revs, it runs in a very well-mannered fashion.

Thanks to those bolstered accessible torque levels, plus the influence of the mild-hybrid assistance, the engine pulls stoutly and cleanly, and doesn't feel like it depends on revs to knuckle down. If not brisk, there's certainly a sense that this is a fairly assertive-performing car through the middle of the rev range, and it keeps revving well enough up to about 5000rpm, tailing off notably from there. Odd though it may seem, this is an atmo petrol engine in which to short-shift, then.

Mazda's performance claims for the car are particularly conservative, at 9.7sec from 0-62mph. During our slowest runs (damp surface, depleted hybrid battery), it was a second quicker than that; and on its quickest, nearer two seconds quicker.

The 24V hybrid assistance would only seem to provide optimum pace for the car for short periods, and is soon spent. Moreover, it's a little annoying that Mazda doesn't provide particular instrumentation to keep tabs on its charge – and available 'boost' – level.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Weighty and tactile controls; taut body control; crisp handling response
CONS Some firmness around town

There's lots of weight and connected feel about the CX-30's manual gearshifter and its power steering at low speeds. It's increasingly rare to find a smallish volume-selling car like this with a 'handshake' so meaty- and solid-feeling.

Sometimes the gearlever does need a second stab of clutch pedal to slip into second gear, and when parking especially, you're aware that a little more physical effort at the wheel is needed than is typical of crossover hatchbacks. But neither really counts as a demerit for this car – more like an avowal to communicate with the driver, and to engage them from minute one.

It's testament to Mazda's careful dynamic execution that such a positioning doesn't make for an incongruously firm or highly strung character on the road. The CX-30's steering is medium-paced, and always gently tactile, precise and intuitive. Its ride is comfortable at low speeds and high, with a taut, connected feel around town that only occasionally raises a fidget.

The 18in alloy wheels, wrapped in 55-profile tyres of no particular performance brief, make for a mostly quiet ride, except over especially rough asphalt, and a fairly modest grip level that feels like it could stand a little extension.

The body control is certainly crisp enough, and the handling response is neat and clipped, feeling a little unchallenged by the contact patches when the car is cornering quickly. When doing so, it's stable and level, and tends to run out of grip at the front axle first, just as it should, but not before showing off some cornering tenacity and balance.

Those communicative facets always give you a clear picture of how much adhesion is available, which is rare in a car like this.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯨☆

PROS Lowish showroom prices; good standard equipment levels
CONS Personal finance deals aren't too generous; economy is reasonable, not exceptional

The CX-30's UK pricing ranges from just over £25,000 for an entry-level car to nearly £38,000 for a fully loaded, four-wheel-drive e-Skyactiv X Takumi i-AWD.

On list price at least, it's a closer match for a Ford Puma than the Toyota C-HR or Volkswagen T-Roc you might expect it to be positioned against. Mazda's personal finance deals, however, aren't quite as generous as those of some rivals, so on a monthly rate the car may look like less good value.

Our efficiency results indicated that the CX-30 wouldn't be the cheapest option in its class to fuel, our test car falling short of 50mpg on both our touring and everyday schedules. Certainly not by a big enough margin to put it beyond the bounds of the acceptable, though, or to make you regret the influence of that unconventional outsize four-pot engine.

VERDICT

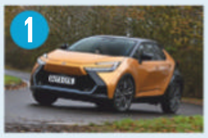
Alternative powertrain is a credit to an unconventional compact SUV

★★★★☆

The Mazda CX-30 isn't the average compact family car – but it's a long way from weird. There is, in fact, something of a knowing disregard for the stale, filtered, spiritless norms that cast many crossovers as wannabe luxury SUVs in miniature.

It's a car with limited, but effective, ambitions towards extra versatility and convenience, true. But it performs and handles with some energy and zest, and is pleasant and forthcoming to drive. It's also particularly easy to operate, with a high level of perceived quality, and it even competes with the class's extroverts for design appeal.

RIVALS



1

TOYOTA C-HR
From £31,300
★★★★☆

2

VOLKSWAGEN T-ROC
From £29,045
★★★★☆

3 **MAZDA CX-30**

4

KIA NIRO HYBRID
From £30,085
★★★⯨☆

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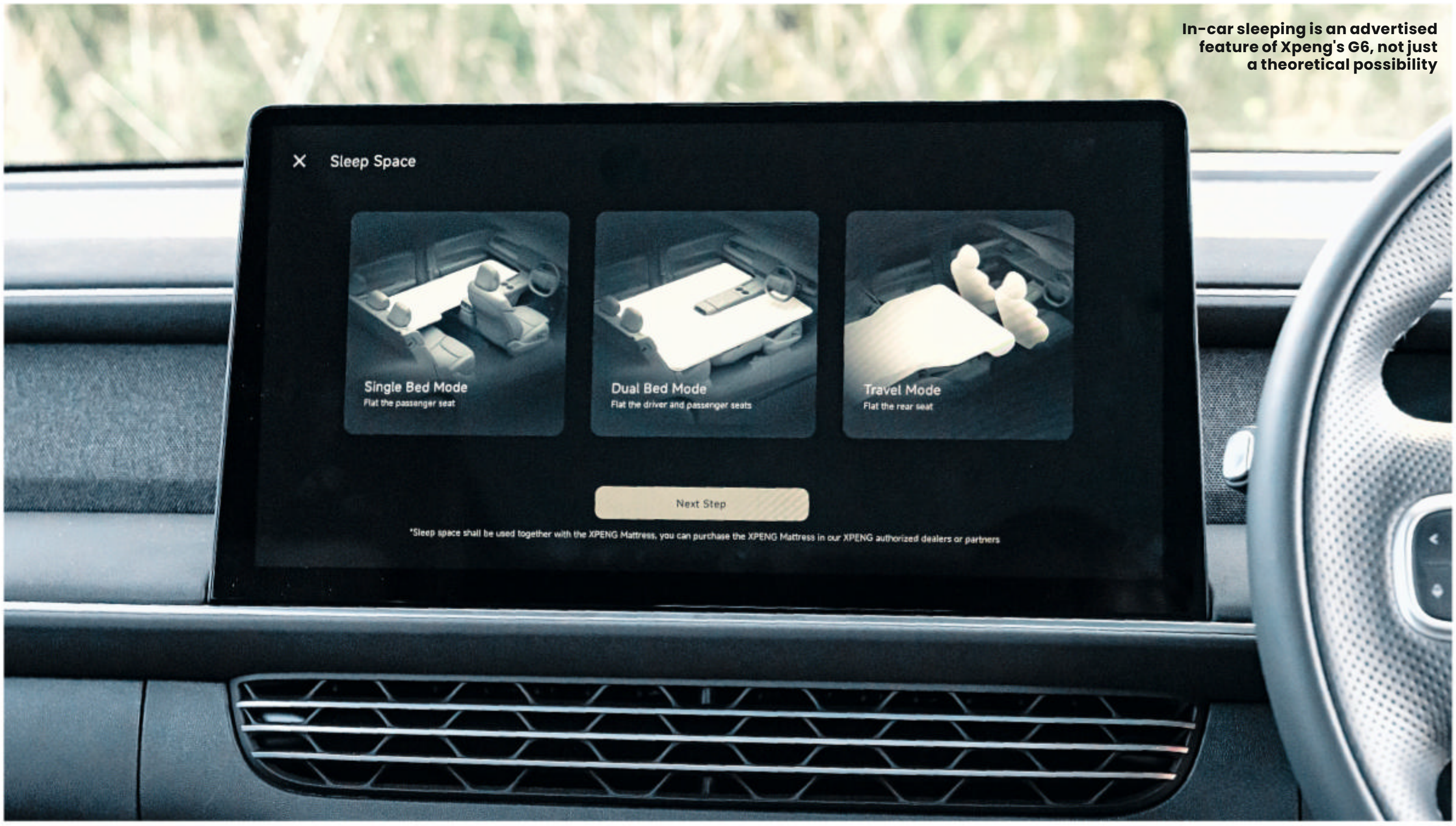
MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing



*Sleep space shall be used together with the XPENG Mattress, you can purchase the XPENG Mattress in our XPENG authorized dealers or partners

In-car sleeping is an advertised feature of Xpeng's G6, not just a theoretical possibility

Have you ever noticed that there are regional market trends for seat adjustment mechanisms? I never had, until a wise colleague some years ago pointed one out. "Japanese and Korean cars very often have lever-style adjusters for seat recline," he said, "whereas European and American cars [those without motorised seats, at least] tend to have those wheel-style adjusters that you have to wind all the way up and down."

This, he assured me, is because it's much more common in Asian countries – Japan especially – than it is elsewhere for people to sleep in their cars, and a simpler recline mechanism (literally just lift, plonk, snore) makes this a lot easier.

Makes sense: I can imagine Tokyo business types, after a ridiculously long day of work and socialising, preferring to grab some shut-eye in the front seat, rather than schlepping an hour home just to get up and turn around all the earlier to come back the following morning.

Better than a tent? A grubby B&B room? Or just driving home?

> "Even where it is safe and legal, we still live in Britain, so…"

And in-car sleeping, funnily enough, might be becoming a global trend. A couple of test cars I've driven recently have been especially suited to it.

The first was the Hyundai Inster, a pint-sized electric hatchback in which all four seats can be folded flat to make a decent-sized sleeping area. Which is especially funny, because the car itself can't be much bigger than a king-sized bed.

The second, about which you will be reading in an upcoming road test, is the Xpeng G6. This is quite a derivative mid-sized electric crossover that's plainly out to steal the lunch of the Tesla Model Y. The fact that it offers no fewer than three 'sleep space' cabin layouts might be the most interesting thing about it.

Because the front seats are motorised, the car at least partially converts itself. You just whip out the front headrests, then select which 'mode' you want from the touchscreen. You can have one front seat flattened or both of them, or you can have the front chairs motored forwards and convert the back-seat area and boot for sleeping (the back-seat folding is done manually).

An inflatable mattress can be supplied with the car as an accessory, to be pumped up from the 12V socket. And then, and rather importantly, once your sleeping area is set up, the climate control will stay active for as long as you like, maintaining a comfortable slumbering temperature, whereas in other cars it would automatically shut down after a while. Presumably because it's electric, the G6 can shuffle power between its high- and low-voltage power circuits to enable this. And you might well have it plugged in and on charge at the same time, of course.

The infotainment system can play a range of lullaby-like audio tracks while you drop off, too. The crackling of a bonfire was my favourite.

Car-sleeping is the kind of thing that gets romanticised in car brochures, but I doubt if it would really catch on as a selling point in the UK. Our laws are quite particular about where and how it's legal to do it. Make a habit of it and you're likely to be woken by a police officer before too long, because sleeping in a car while inebriated remains a specific criminal offence. But, frankly, who would want to do it sober?

It's often prohibited in private car parks. You need to seek permission if you're on privately owned land. And even in the places where it is safe and legal, we still live in Britain, of course, so you're likely to attract attention from locals who assume you're homeless, dispossessed or simply odd and would rather report you to the police and have you moved on than let you represent any kind of risk to their golden retriever.

In any case, the G6 that I tested didn't have the mattress accessory included, so sadly I couldn't properly test its effectiveness as a mobile sleeping pod. I would have been willing, reader, in the interests of journalistic thoroughness. I'm just not quite sure where I would have parked to do it, or what people would have thought of me.

Insanity check

Where does the CLE 53 sit in the AMG firmament? To find out, **STEPHEN DOBIE** brings along its rowdiest forebear of all

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

CLE 53 provides a digital-rich, well-equipped cabin

The arches give it away. The Mercedes-AMG CLE 53 Coupé arrived on a wave of exciting claims – ones we knew we would have to put sternly to the test. But given that AMG had gone to the effort of extending its rear wheel arches by 75mm (accommodating a similarly widened axle and wheels wrapped in bespoke Michelin rubber), it was safe to assume it would hit harder than the 53s before it. And it promptly did.

Golly, did AMG need the shot in the arm that the CLE 53 brought too, after its reputation had been more than a little shaken by the response to a hybridised C63 with half the usual cylinder count. That car had proved a far cry from the AMG glory days – a time perhaps no better represented than by this gleaming white CLK 63 Black Series. Launched in 2007, the model became a bona fide modern classic very soon after. It's a pure distillation of the DNA scattered more sparingly beneath the CLE's skin.

The perfect barometer to see just how 'AMG' this 53 really is, it also has bruising rear arches, although it wears them like uncouthly tacked-on shoulder pads. On a biting winter's day like today, when the roads are cold and greasy, the newer car should be the more immediately inviting of the two, but the scarcity of the CLK makes its door handle impossible to resist. Just 30 were allocated to the UK at its launch, and while this left-hand-drive example suggests a few might have sneaked over since, howmanyleft.co.uk reckons just 28 remain in Britain. No wonder it's worth more now than its "frankly ridiculous" £99,517 at launch. Yes, those are the words of our ever-scrupulous testers...

"This is the most extreme Mercedes currently on sale, including the SLR," we declared when we drove it in January 2008. The gawps and guffaws it still elicits at mere walking pace prove its enduring shock value. And there is true substance to back up its style. This was the contemporary Formula 1 safety car wearing a pair of numberplates. Over and above the 'regular' CLK 63, it gained 26bhp, revisions to its gear ratios, brakes and steering and a newly adjustable suspension set-up (albeit manually), with wider tracks – 75mm front, 66mm rear – necessitating those cartoonish arches. There was extra bracing in the engine bay and swathes of carbonfibre just about everywhere – even across the chasm left empty by its absent rear seats.

Yet its kerb weight matched its base car, despite a bank of blanked-out switches; there's not even a parking sensor to be found, somewhat terrifyingly, given the car's value.

However, this doesn't immediately feel like the track-hardened, driver-focused weapon it was lauded as in the late noughties. Sure, its engine fires ferociously into life, practically rocking the bodywork around you. But the steering wheel looks mundane Merc, no aggressive wings or roll-cage latticework fill your mirrors and a fiddly lever operates an occasionally reticent automatic gearbox. It's a world away from the lightened flywheels and chuntering revs of other Stuttgart-born specials of the era.

Like the very best driver's cars, though, the Black Series' magic is easily found. While the transmission does feel ponderous under ▸

Rare CLK has blank switches but retains an upmarket aura

> **"This is a real 'last gallon on Earth' contender, a car focused on fun"**

◂ interrogation (even its sportier modes need a mental 'one… two…' between shifts), every other element of the car feels so constantly alive that you'll never pine for anything else. Beyond the Comfort, Sport or Manual modes of the 'box, there's nothing left to press beyond the ESP button (which does 'on' or 'off' with a mere tap), so you can get right into the thick of driving it.

It's surprising how compliant the ride feels. We're used to the gnarliest specials rattling our teeth and spine in road use, but the Black Series is never anything other than a fast, ferocious Mercedes-Benz, smoothing the edges of Britain's road surfaces. You could spend hundreds of miles ensconced in its bucket seat and feel brilliant. There's certainly little need to trailer it to a track day, even if an SUV with a tow hook might deliver better fuel efficiency.

But you will almost certainly set an early alarm so you can take the long route there. This is a real 'last gallon on Earth' contender, a car designed with its focus almost unwaveringly on fun. And despite its incongruous comfort, it's no softie, providing the feel and fidelity of some of the greatest track specials yet demanding little of their commitment. Its steering bubbles away, telegraphing the movements of a car that teeters on the edge of mimicking a V8 Caterham in its swagger. You feel the moment its driven wheels begin to relinquish grip, as the rear starts to arc wide, and it's your choice whether to feed in more power and indulge it or back off and neaten things up. It *can* do neat and tidy, but it feels at its most authentic moving around, smearing the Tarmac even with the ESP on. And, boy, is it quick once you're pointing straight, bounding forwards in a way that belies its 1.7 tonnes. It's a car I simply don't want to hand back. If it's this spectacular now, what must it have felt like at the time?

The CLE 53 can never match such large heart and character, but it exhibits real dynamism right from the off. Its 4Matic+ four-wheel drive continually shifts power around but has a definite rear bias and, allied with all-wheel steering (a first in a 53 model), it demonstrates more urgency than its endlessly plush (and pixel-rich) cabin might otherwise suggest. There's certainly no bank of blank switches in here. Mind, it's disarmingly easy to manoeuvre compared with the burly Black Series. The rear steer and an abundance of parking cameras make moving it around a doddle, yet as soon as you're rolling, there's evident nous to the more mechanical bits beneath.

It exhibits real tension in the ride, whichever of the multitudinous modes you've selected, and a pleasing snarl from the six-cylinder up front in its sportier settings. The whooshes and hisses of turbocharging that are proudly absent in the vociferously atmo CLK bring welcome character to the progress you make in here. Although it will never match the gargling war cry of that venerable 6.2-litre V8, this CLE sounds good.

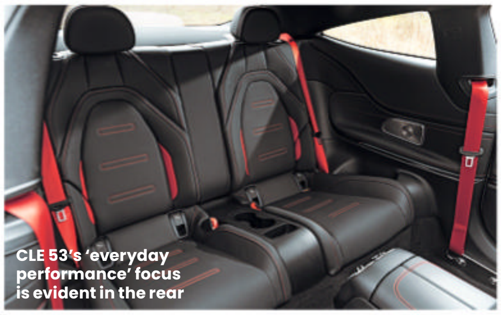
Its powertrain is largely free of lag too (gaps in the power delivery are papered over by a 22bhp mild-hybrid element), but the keener among us are still encouraged to wring out the revs. Just shift up slightly below the limiter in manual mode: it cuts in keenly. Even though its headline accelerative benchmark betters that of the Black Series, the CLE 53 doesn't feel as outrageously quick, its 58 fewer horses and 165 extra kilograms taking some of the blame. I like its relative modesty, though: it's not as outlandishly, unusably fast as some sports saloon rivals have become and you can at least feel like you're exploring its performance and approaching its limits like in the more slapstick CLK.

This CLE represents a much more rounded package and can't help feeling a bit staid in such company. But even a cursory scroll through its bewildering mix of modes unleashes something that can thrill, something that will provide depth as an ownership proposition. It's never going to imitate the slightly unhinged hot rods it shares those evocative three letters with, and it definitely prefers grip to slip, but its rear wheels can still scrabble naughtily on dank days. You can take it by the scruff on the right road.

A whole suite of AMG Dynamics stuff keeps the 4WD, rear steering and stability control systems in check through a range of 'difficulty levels' from Basic to Master. Spec the optional £7500 Pro Performance Package (not present here) and you even get a higher, Black Series-matching 186mph top speed and a RWD-only drift mode, once you have loosened the electronic helpers to enable it.

But this AMG is an involving car without it, even if you do need to be laying on at least a little aggression to unleash its mischievous side. It only ever moves under your duress, whereas the old CLK is unashamedly, belligerently itself and drags you along with its whims while keeping you fully versed on its intentions. The CLE 53 makes you go looking for its own, cloaking them beneath a few more layers of luxury and awaiting your command to loosen its inhibitions. But crucially, it still will. Just as those arches promised. **A**

Carbon and removed rear seats are part of this special CLK's diet


CLE 53's 'everyday performance' focus is evident in the rear

CLE's front wheels, like the rears, are driven and steer

Simpler roles on CLK: the fronts steer, the rears drive

Thanks to SL Shop (theslshop.com) for the loan of its CLK Black Series

GRATEFUL EIGHT

Wonderful though this CLE 53 can be, what we're really clamouring for is a full-bore V8 CLE. And, thank heavens, it appears we're getting it. Last year, Autocar published spy shots of an apparent V8 twin-turbo CLE 63 amid claims from Mercedes R&D boss Markus Schäfer that the firm was closely monitoring sales of the four-cylinder hybrid C63, a car whose powertrain continues to drip in controversy. "We will stay close to the feedback of people and customers, and then we will go from that," he said.

> *"You can feel like you're exploring its performance and its limits"*

Despite their different briefs and eras, there are many similarities

WHAT PRICE A BLACK SERIES?

The CLK 63 Black Series cost a hefty £99,517 in 2007 but is worth every single penny (and more) now. This gleaming white, left-hand-drive example, with 31,000 miles on its odometer, is listed by SL Shop for £99,995. Its expat first owner brought it with them from the UAE, proving its addictive nature. You will pay up to £125,000 for a RHD car of similar mileage.

Want rear seats and more introverted styling? The stock CLK 63 still possesses 474bhp and can be had with 67k miles for £20,995.

The original, sub-400bhp CLK 55 looks even more of a steal, with most examples comfortably below £10,000. All the more reason to arrange a thorough inspection, though…

	MERCEDES-BENZ CLK 63 AMG BLACK SERIES	MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53 4MATIC+ COUPE
Price	£99,517 (new), £125,000 (now)	£73,075
Engine	V8, 6208cc, petrol	6 cyls in line, 2999cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power	500bhp at 6800rpm	442bhp at 5800-6100rpm
Torque	465lb ft at 5250rpm	413lb ft at 1800-5000rpm
Gearbox	7-spd automatic, RWD	9-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight	1760kg	1925kg
0-62mph	4.3sec	4.2sec
Top speed	186mph	155mph
Economy	18.5mpg (NEDC)	29.5mpg (WLTP)
CO_2, tax band	369g/km, na	217g/km, 37%
Rivals	Porsche 911 GT3 (997), BMW M3 (E92)	BMW M440i Coupé, Audi S5 Sportback

AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

Newark's tractor show draws a devoted crowd. **JOHN EVANS** pays a visit

Love of four wheels isn't exclusive to car fanciers. At last year's Newark Vintage Tractor & Heritage Show, one of many similar events held throughout the country, tractor fanciers were out in force celebrating their four-wheeled passions like petrolheads at a car meet. Through the gates they poured, keen to gawp at the machines that ranged from the humblest horticulture tractors to the show-stopping John Deere 8RX 410, an agricultural colossus with traction-boosting triangular tracks. The real stars of the show, however, were Ford and Massey Ferguson, both the subject of 60th-anniversary celebrations, with the Basildon-built 6X 1000 and Coventry-built 135. They may only be tractors to thee and me but if you've ever seen Jeremy and Kaleb squabbling over who has the best machine on TV's Clarkson's Farm, you may understand why these noble workhorses inspire as much affection as the sexiest sports car.

Proof of how significant a tractoring milestone the 135 was is that while production ended in 1975, thousands of them are still in service today. For the show, 135 of them were arranged in the main ring to form the number '135' – a record gathering, apparently.

"The 135 was popular because it was affordable [it cost £880 in the 1960s], versatile and powerful enough for most jobs," says the chap on the Friends of Ferguson Heritage stand, an organisation formed in

JOHN DEERE
tastes
BISTRO
103
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1994 to celebrate the achievements of Harry Ferguson, in particular his enthusiasm for and development of the three-point tractor linkage that allowed trailed implements to be supported on a hydraulic system.

Outside, I wander among the 135 Massey Fergusons. An enthusiast is taking pictures of each one. "It's an achievement to get this many together," he says. "I've just photographed one from the US. It has a Perkins petrol engine rather than the usual three-cylinder Perkins diesel." He directs me towards a 1971 135 still on its original tyres from the days when it worked on a nearby sugar beet farm. It's now enjoying a well-earned retirement as part of a collection in County Cork.

Sugar beet is big round here in Newark. I resist the temptation to explore the Celebration of Sugar Beet display but am snared by the members of the Vale of Belvoir Machinery Group keen to explain their 1943 British-built mechanical beet topper, lifter and cleaner, which flicked mud-free beets into a hopper before then depositing them in piles for easy collection.

Fascinating stuff, but is that a 1917 Fowler traction engine I see before me? Its driver, Gordon Hutton, invites me up – "Don't touch the controls, for God's sake," he warns – where he tells me the engine was part of a pair that would stand at either end of a field and pull a plough back and forth. I'd always wondered what these giant beasts were for, other than drawing crowds at agricultural shows.

I've reported on remote-control car racing before, but in another hall is something better still: remote-control excavating. Watched by fascinated spectators of all ages, members of the Lincolnshire RC Truckers club have set their assorted mini-machines to work shovelling, piling, scraping and hauling piles of earth. Elsewhere, miniature HGVs perform three-point turns while white vans dash around delivering parcels. The group, formed in 2016, now has 150 members and 200,000 Facebook followers. Club president John Crockett tells me that prices for the trucks start at around £1500 but go all the way to £10,000 for the hand-built diggers. "Construction models are very popular," he says. A member leans in to say operating them is a form of therapy. "After a day at work, it's nice to come home and dig," he adds.

From model trucks to the real thing. This year, Newark was also celebrating some truck anniversaries, namely 85 years of the Bedford O-series and 50 years of the Sandbach-built ERF B-series lorry. Ian Moxon, a truck driver and a director of the Edwin Richard Foden society, is standing guard over three B-series trucks. "It was the first ERF with a tilting cab," he tells me. "The trucks weren't cheap, but they were cheap to operate. It's why it was called the 'gaffer's motor'. We drivers called them the Ever Reliable Friend."

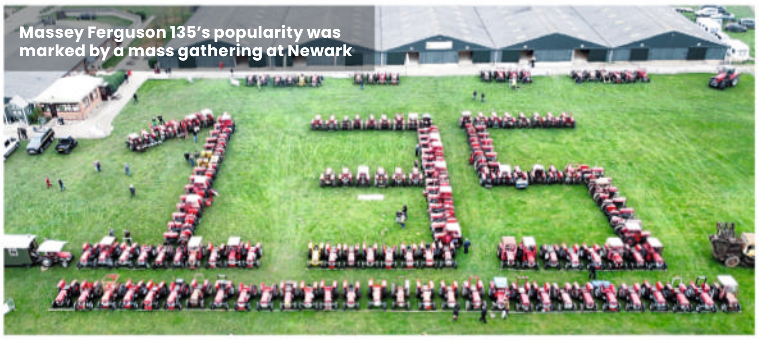
Elsewhere, visitors are huddled in clusters around assorted trucks, most of them quite unremarkable (the trucks, that is). What's the appeal, I ask one chap. "They've all got a story," he replies. David Gedney is a retired truck driver and the exhibit that's caught his attention is a Volvo F10, registered in 1994. "I had three of these," he says. Twenty years ago, I was earning £700 a week driving trucks – about the same drivers earn today. I'm glad I've retired!" I leave him with his thoughts.

A small display of four classic cars, including a handsome Rover P5, heaves into view. After a morning in the company of trucks and tractors, it's like coming home.

TRACTORS TO SUPERCARS

The Newark Vintage Tractor & Heritage Show was a good opportunity to remind visitors of the strong links between cars and tractors. In one hall was a beautifully restored 1956 Porsche-Diesel Super tractor. Porsche had ceased to make tractors long before the mid-1950s, but it allowed their continued production under licence. The arrangement would help to finance the marque's car models including the 356 coupé of 1948. Before turning his hand to cars, Ferruccio Lamborghini produced tractors, too.

Harry Ferguson of Massey Ferguson fame helped develop the four-wheel drive system, which, after his death, would eventually resurface in the Jensen FF. Staying with Harry Ferguson, the engineer famously shook hands on a deal with Henry Ford, with the latter agreeing to market the Ferguson-Brown tractor as the Ford 9N in the US in 1939.



Massey Ferguson 135's popularity was marked by a mass gathering at Newark

Gordon Hutton (right) shows off his 1917 Fowler traction engine to Evans

Loyal followers of the 135 pored over every detail of their revered workhorse

"A 1971 Massey Ferguson is still on its original tyres"

RICHARD JOHNSON

Heart of the matter

The Vision Driving Experience is a test mule for BMW's next generation of vehicle dynamics technology. **JAMES ATTWOOD** straps himself in

"The engineers won't even tell me how much power this has," says development driver Jens Klingmann, as he casually hurls the BMW Vision Driving Experience into a corner fast enough for the tyres to howl in protest. "But it's a lot." Given that my insides are still churning from the hit of acceleration at the start, he didn't really need to say that last bit.

The Vision Driving Experience is, indeed, a lot. It's a lot of car, with a lot of motors, a lot of fans (we will get to those) and a lot of performance. And it has a lot of significance for the ongoing development of BMW's next-generation Neue Klasse EVs, which will start to arrive this year.

This isn't just your average prototype, then. But at heart that's basically what it is: a quad-motor, high-power EV test mule styled on the next-gen 3 Series saloon, which has been pounding around various test facilities during recent months.

Four motors and a ridiculous power output? That sounds quite a lot like the forthcoming first electric M3, doesn't it? Except BMW insists the Vision Driving Experience (let's call it the VDE for short) isn't a test mule for the next M3. Instead, the firm describes it as a one-off test rig on wheels, a moving laboratory used to hone technology being developed for all future Neue Klasse models in an extreme environment. The development work being done with it is as relevant to the next single-motor, entry-level iX3 SUV as it will be to whatever M division's engineers concoct for their electric offerings.

Perhaps because of the development work for which it has been created, until now the VDE has been cloaked in secrecy – and we're not just talking about its camouflage wrap. But the fact that BMW recently strapped me (thankfully tightly) into the passenger seat for a short – but very fast – ride shows that Munich now wants to showcase exactly why it has been created. Although Klingmann's inability (or perhaps refusal) to share its power output indicates that the veil of secrecy isn't fully lifted. ▶

The VDE test mule's styling is based on that of the next-generation 3 Series saloon

What BMW has confirmed is that the VDE is powered by four electric motors – one for each wheel – and can produce peak torque of 13,269lb ft. And no, that's not a typo. There isn't an official power output, but given its ridiculous torque output, you can probably guess it's pretty high. BMW hasn't given any performance stats, either, but after my ride in it, I would say the 0-62mph time can be described as 'brisk'.

Beyond the four motors, the other thing we have been told about are those fans. Five of them, in fact. BMW calls them impellers, and they serve to literally suck the car to the ground. Each fan requires 50kW of energy to run, but combined they add around 1000kg of downforce, in turn allowing Klingmann to push even harder in corners (see box, right).

All of that torque and downforce is really there to develop one small but very significant black box full of computer chips and loaded with software. That would be BMW's new Heart of Joy, the unusually named hardware and software stack that will unify the computer systems that run the powertrain and driving dynamics systems on future EVs into a single unit. It's the first time BMW has unified those systems, and the firm claims the system has been developed entirely in-house.

"The Heart of Joy will run all the key driving functions of the car," says BMW driving dynamics expert Christian Thalmeier. "But to develop those, we need to push the technology. Even production cars with only one electric motor will gain advantages from the work we're doing on a car with four motors."

> *"You can make the car more agile by running motors at different speeds"*

Development driver Klingmann is also a successful GT racer

It might seem like overkill to build a super-powerful, fan-laden development hack just to test a computer processing unit, but the idea is that if the Heart of Joy can handle anything the VDE can throw at it in the real world, it can handle pretty much anything. So how does it work?

Traditionally, the powertrain and driving dynamics systems have been separate units. The powertrain system takes the inputs from your foot on the accelerator and sends that as a request to the powertrain, whether a combustion engine or a single or pair of electric motors. Meanwhile, a separate driving dynamics unit receives inputs from the steering wheel and brakes, along with any other data the car's sensors might get from the external environment. Those two systems run in parallel, so there's a small but potentially significant lag when they need to send data to each other, and there are limitations on how closely they can operate together.

The Heart of Joy unites those systems into a single unit that receives all those inputs in the same place, processes them simultaneously and then sends the information to up to four motors along with the brakes, steering and so on. BMW says it allows for communication that's up to 10 times faster than that used on cars that were on sale in 2021. That's a big boost when trying to precisely modulate power and braking to best fit the conditions. But there are other benefits too.

On most current EVs, friction braking is controlled by the driving dynamics unit while regeneration through the motors is the responsibility of the powertrain system. That's why you can sometimes feel an imbalance if you're slowing using the regen and then need to apply the brakes.

"When recuperation is only done by the powertrain, you can't use the whole potential of it," says Thalmeier. "You need the driving dynamics system to work out how to enlarge the recuperation." He cites the example of a rear-biased car – yes, future BMW EVs will still be rear-driven or rear-biased – cornering at speed.

"When there's a load change, you can only put a certain amount of longitudinal force on the tyres before the car becomes unstable," he says. "So to keep the car balanced, you have to take away either lateral or longitudinal force. Because you're cornering and you can't remove the lateral force, you have to reduce the recuperation to keep the car stable. But that's not what we want: we want to add stability by recuperation.

"Now, though, we're so quick at taking data from the sensors on the car about yaw rate, lateral and longitudinal acceleration and how stable the car is that we can change things. If it's still stable, we can do a bit of recuperation, and when it gets unstable, it will be quickly reduced."

There's another benefit: the Heart of Joy can take your braking inputs and work out the most efficient way of stopping the car, which in most cases will be via the motor. That increases the use of regen, which BMW claims makes the car up to 25% more efficient. Not a huge amount but a useful gain, given that the aim is for most drivers to not know whether it's the brakes or the motor slowing their machine.

The Heart of Joy won't just help when you're slowing down your BMW, though: it will help you go faster. Again, a combustion car has a single power source, so systems such as variable four-wheel drive or torque vectoring have to go through various mechanical systems to divide up that power. But the new system can take power from one, two, three or four motors and continuously adjust where it's sent to, keeping the car better balanced and more stable.

Besides simply adding raw power, Thalmeier says adding motors will make a big difference to future Neue Klasse models. "We're influencing the driving dynamics," he adds. "If you think of three electric motors with one on the front axle and two on the rear, you can help steer with the rear axle by making one wheel faster and the other slower. So you can make the car agile purely through running the electric motors at different speeds. Any existing actuator or rear-wheel steering system isn't as quick as our new electric motors will be."

Which brings us back to the passenger seat of the VDE, with Klingmann laughing as he jams the throttle and sends the machine down the straight of the BMW Spartanburg Performance Centre test track at something approaching warp speed. It's actually surprisingly comfortable inside, with comfy sports seats and a working version of BMW's new iDrive system on the dashboard. Even in its test hacks, Munich does premium well.

But can you feel the Heart of Joy at work? Being honest, no, not really, but that's in part because on a cold day in South Carolina tyre grip is limited and Klingmann confesses the road-legal rubber is the limiting factor. But as my innards slowly settle once I've escaped the passenger seat, the performance of the Vision Driving Experience – and the systems underpinning it – is clear. The closest comparison I can make is with a passenger ride in an electric rallycross supercar. Impressive, then. And it certainly whets the appetite for the potential of a quad-motor electric M3.

BMW CEO Oliver Zipse first hinted at the Heart of Joy at the 2023 Neue Klasse launch

Upcoming Neue Klasse SUVs and saloons will use Heart of Joy tech

SUCK IT AND SEE: FANS EXPLAINED

The BMW Vision Driving Experience's five impeller fans are the car's undoubted party piece, as demonstrated when its engineers fired them up for a demonstration when it was back in the garage.

For a comparison of how loud they are, imagine standing underneath the wing of an Airbus A380 when the pilot presses the start button.

Essentially, they serve to stick the car to the ground, adding downforce without the need for big aerodynamics. But could they ever reach production?

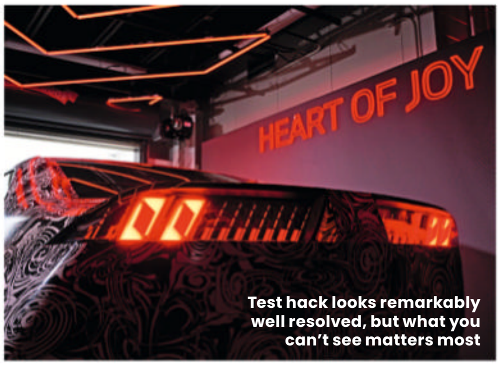
"You won't see anything like this in a production car," says Christian Thalmeier. "It's just too expensive. They are just for the system on this car. If you have a lot of downforce and then you add a lot of torque, it makes it very hard to accelerate. What we're interested in with this car is how to deal with the acceleration in the software.

"It's purely a development tool. It's not even a driving dynamics tool; it's just another thing that makes it faster for us to develop functions."

VDE concept's cabin is well developed and features latest version of iDrive

Deeply bolstered sports seats are very comfortable – and just as necessary

Eye-catching wheel design is unlikely to make production



Test hack looks remarkably well resolved, but what you can't see matters most

HEART OF JOY

GETTY IMAGES

NEVER A DULL DAY

Car interiors are the new frontier of automotive creativity, as **AYSAR GHASSAN** explains

After decades of ubiquitous grey, black and cream interiors, car makers are finally experimenting with more adventurous combinations of colours and materials.

The new Fiat Grande Panda pairs a blue dashboard and seat upholstery with yellow mood lighting; Mini is stitching bold, brightly coloured patterns into the Aceman's dashboard and door linings; and Volvo is using recycled plastic from discarded PVC windows for some of its interior materials paired with recycled fishing nets for floor mats in its EX30.

As we usher in, at long last, an era of more adventurous and innovative and uplifting cabin design, here are the developments and trends that will shape your next car's cockpit.

ADVENTUROUS CONTRASTS

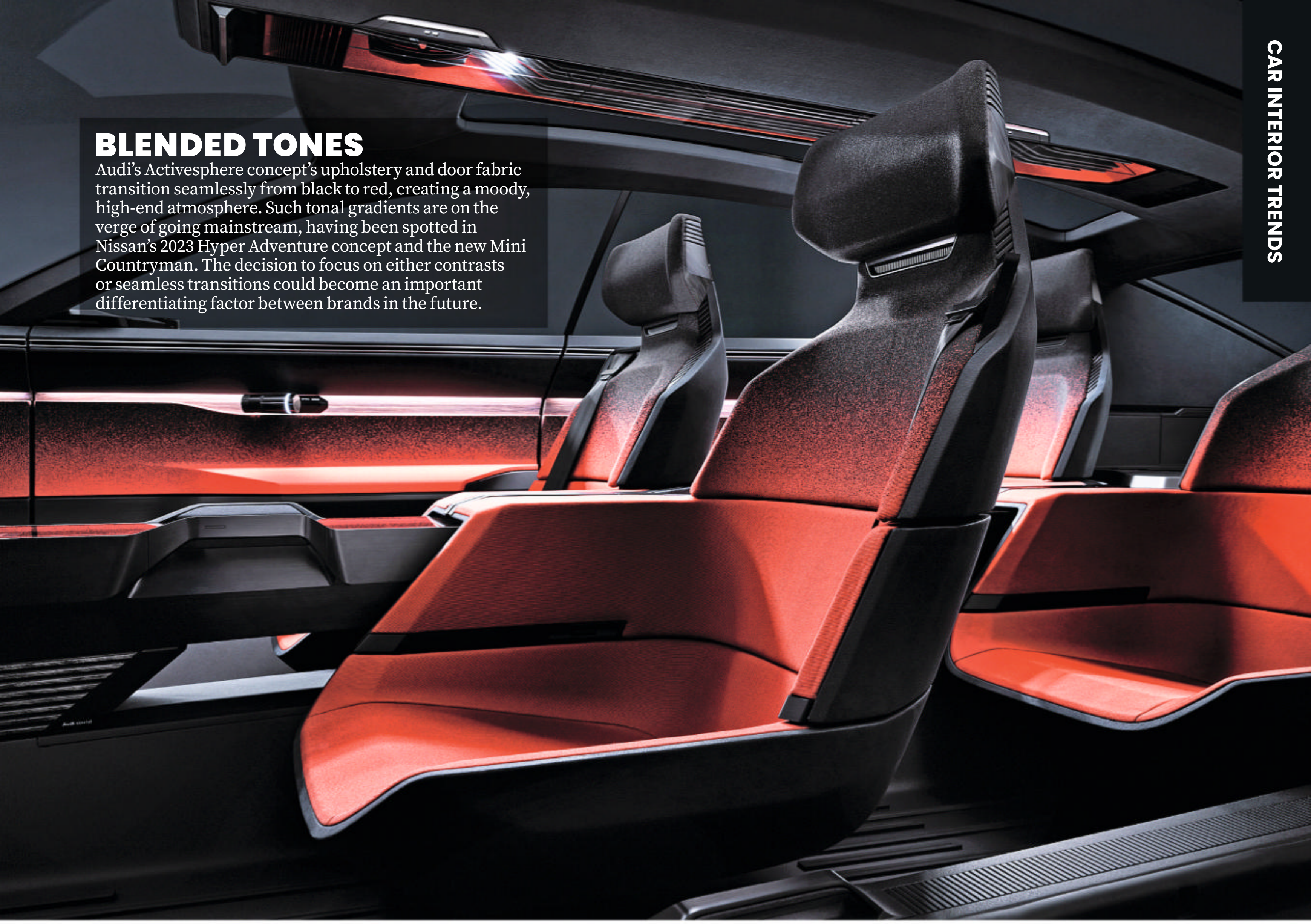
Tesla popularised the trend for dark and light contrasts, but the interior of the Lexus LF-ZL SUV concept shows us what's possible when designers go to town on pairing opposites. As well as coupling grey, light brown and off-white, Lexus has combined materials with very different textures, including ribbed door panels and shag carpet. This is a step too far for widespread application, but more daring use of contrasting colours and materials is coming imminently.

PURPLE

Genesis went all in on gothic tones for its Neolun SUV concept, but the trend for dark purple is expected to translate in more subtle ways to more mainstream vehicles over the next year or so.

SUNSHINE TONES

The colour of 2024, Apricot Crush (according to trend analysis firm WGSN), has been used liberally in the BMW Vision Neue Klasse X concept's cabin (above). Urangoo Samba, head of colour at WGSN, says the tone "speaks to today's consumers who seek light and positivity". Similar warm colours are set to make their way to production this year on details such as seatbelts, cubbyholes and mood lighting, as previewed inside the Skoda Epiq concept.



BLENDED TONES

Audi's Activesphere concept's upholstery and door fabric transition seamlessly from black to red, creating a moody, high-end atmosphere. Such tonal gradients are on the verge of going mainstream, having been spotted in Nissan's 2023 Hyper Adventure concept and the new Mini Countryman. The decision to focus on either contrasts or seamless transitions could become an important differentiating factor between brands in the future.

CUSTOMISATION

3D printing has made production of intricately detailed objects and more customisation commercially viable. Renault, for example, is using it on a range of colourful storage bins in its new 5 E-Tech. With owners looking to stamp their personality onto their cars, increased customisation of interior details is becoming a hot trend.

SMART SURFACES

Car makers are experimenting with smart surfaces to create simpler, less cluttered environments. Smart materials appear plain but contain hidden technology that comes alive when desired. The BMW i Vision Dee concept's woven dash doubles as a control panel and projects infotainment onto the windscreen. Smart surfaces are likely to be commonplace inside high-end interiors by the end of the decade, transforming them into boutique spaces for work or relaxation.

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LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

> "The i5 melted into daily driving, whether town, motorway or B-road"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 13,519**

BMW i5 TOURING

Time is up with our bells-and-whistles electric exec. How did it fare?

WHY WE RAN IT To see if the definitive executive car – a BMW 5 Series – is now electric, albeit in £100k-plus M60 xDrive guise

The BMW i5 Touring has returned to its maker, having spent several months on the Autocar fleet in my custody. A time that has been almost entirely pleasurable.

To recap, the i5 is an electric version of BMW's 5 Series Touring, once (perhaps still) the archetypal big executive wagon. Bigger than ever, in fact, at more than 5.0 metres long and 1.9m wide, and with a lot of architecture that's common between 5 and 7 Series BMWs.

In making the car electric, BMW has fitted it with 81.2kWh of (usable) battery, and because this is the M version, it has 592bhp deployed through all four wheels. That's enough to give it a 0-62mph time of 3.9sec and a top speed, although I didn't get near trying it, of 143mph.

As a result of the hardware, it's heavy, at 2425kg – but that is still lighter than the latest M5 Touring.

But while it says M in the name, has nearly 600bhp and acceleration figures that would have stolen many a Top Trumps hand only a few years ago, this car is very much 5 Series first and an M car only in passing. It's basically a fast and largely painless luxury estate that is big on features and pretty tidy when it comes to being comfortable.

Well, I've come to think it has the luxury blend about right. Some of our earlier first drives felt that the rolling comfort of the M60 wasn't quite isolated enough, but familiarity can do strange things to you. Across 12,000 miles during our time together, the i5 has coaxed me into its way of thinking when it comes to dealing with road lumps and bumps: I know which potholes to drive around and what the ideal attack speed is for local speed humps.

M spec adds a touch of sportiness

On more accommodating rubber than its low-profile Pirelli P Zeros, I'm sure it would be more compliant, and if I was asked to recommend or spec up an i5, I might well advise more tyre sidewall. But I didn't find this dynamic specification a drag, and no passenger ever said it was too firm.

SECOND OPINION

I've lost count of the number of times I've recommended the i5 Touring. I can't recall an EV I've driven that is so comfortable and premium-feeling while still offering sporty flair (in this M60 guise) and enough rear space for a flat move. Range was never an issue, either. The best executive EV there is? It's got my vote. **WR**

Nor, though, should you think of it as a real driver's car. I was frequently glad it has a low driving position and a smaller frontal area than an SUV, and with a low centre of gravity it doesn't roll much either. The steering is quick and accurate, too, and the throttle response is terrifically well judged. But it's not

The i5 is dynamically capable, if a little clinical rather than engaging

A big supermarket – or animal feed – shop fits with lots of room to spare

Some of the controls are a bit of a fiddle

engaging or interactive; it's the kind of car that you just subconsciously think into place. I can't remember the way it drives annoying me, but I haven't had a memorable drive in it, either. A few years ago I ran a Polestar 2 and still recall one B-road thrash on which it seemed to get better as the dampers got warmer. The BMW is a better and preferable car, but it's quietly effective rather than overtly charismatic.

The i5 just melted into daily driving, whether that's town, motorway or B-road. Using certain features became habits: on start-up I'd press a centre console button and then two on the touchscreen to disable lane assist and traffic sign reading (although the latter didn't stop it occasionally telling me I was driving the wrong way down one particular street, incorrectly and infuriatingly). And if I was slowly manoeuvring forwards but wanted better visibility, I learned to flick the drive selector briefly into reverse and back to D again, which would pull up the all-round cameras. Other ergonomics are a mix of great (the rotating dial on the steering wheel for the audio) and weird (remote, part-digital buttons for the air vents). What I could never quite work out is what car-locking routine would later give me keyless entry – and I usually locked it with the key fob at home because I plugged the car in most times I parked it.

Nothing went wrong, save the occasional reluctance to perform some CarPlay actions. It didn't require servicing during its time with us, and I reckon the front tyres would have been good for up to 20,000 miles, the rears for longer. The purchase price is high and the depreciation is steep, but the benefit-in-kind is incredibly low.

To the other obligatory electric car mathematics, then, with the usual caveats about whether an EV is right for you (like winter tyres, you will probably know by now if it will suit you or not). In warmer weather I consistently got 250 miles or more out of the BMW's battery, but that slipped notably when it was really cold. I did once or twice approach the WLTP range of 321 miles, which should be considered more like a slow-cruise long-distance touring figure.

Could I have done better than my 240- to 260-mile average? Sure, but if an owner wants to drive slowly and use as little energy as possible, they are probably not going to be buying/leasing/whatever a 600bhp BMW in the first place. Choose the i5, though, and what you're getting is a dynamically capable, low and stable, fast and responsive and ultimately quite satisfying luxurious estate car.

MATT PRIOR

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

BMW i5 M60 xDRIVE TOURING

MILEAGE

At start 1261
At end 13,519

PRICES

List price new £99,090
List price now £99,995
Price as tested £116,060

OPTIONS

M Adaptive Suspension Pro £4000, Comfort Plus pack £3350, Technology Plus pack £3300, sunroof £1600, towbar £1200, Tanzanite blue paint £1095, carbon exterior styling £920, clarity controls £600

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed range 321 miles
Battery 83.9/81.2kWh (total/usable)
Test average 3.2mpkWh
Test best 3.9mpkWh
Test worst 2.6mpkWh
Real-world range 257 miles
Max charge rate 205kW

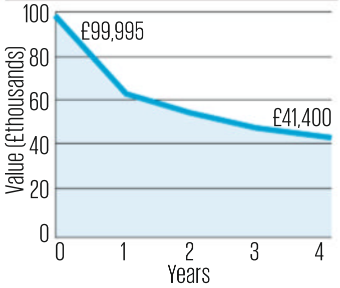
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 3.9sec
Top speed 143mph
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Max power 592bhp
Max torque 586lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Boot 570-1700 litres
Wheels 8.5Jx20in, alloy
Tyres 245/40 R20 (f), 275/35 R20 (r), Pirelli P Zero
Kerb weight 2425kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £1032 pcm
CO$_2$ 0g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £1022
Running costs including fuel £1022
Cost per mile 8 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

16 Oct 2024, 23 Oct, 6 Nov, 13 Nov, 27 Nov, 4 Dec, 31 Dec, 15 Jan 2025, 29 Jan, 12 Feb

LOVE IT

AERODYNAMICS
Small frontal area means the i5 feels light and efficient. BMW has some challenging shapes, but I think this is handsome.

TWIST IT
There's a big touchscreen with too many apps and buttons, but there's also the iDrive rotary controller to save us. Praise be.

MATERIAL QUALITY
Luxury is more than just about materials, of course, but in terms of feel, fit and finish, the i5 is excellent, inside and out.

LOATHE IT

BOOTLID
It's a bit sad there's no separate glass tailgate hatch; instead, the whole thing has to come up. Electrically, too, which is a drag.

PLUG SOCKET
There's a light in the charge port, but it glows outwards rather than in. One on the inside of the flap itself would be better.

MINI COOPER S

Another 50 horses make Mini 'ownership' a whole lot more fun

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To celebrate the last of the small petrol hot hatches

S somehow scythes through corners even more spiritedly than C

Page now has 201bhp and 221lb ft at his disposal for 0-62mph in 6.8sec

As I write, it's the absolute bleakest of the bleak midwinter. My study is as cold as my shed and I'm peering out of a drizzle-slicked window at a rather dour, dark grey hatchback that's coated in a thick film of salt and road slime. Yet I'm feeling atypically upbeat.

The weather is as wet as my January was dry, the sense of freshness that comes with the new year all but dissipated and the prevailing atmosphere rather sombre on the whole, but I've got to drive up to Solihull tomorrow, and I couldn't be happier about it.

Usually, the prospect of schlepping from my south London pad to the West Midlands would have me frantically calculating the possibility of catching a train (or, better yet, some cataclysmic winter bug). And at this time of year, when I will leave under cover of darkness, encounter axle-shattering potholes and risk being sideswiped by spray-blinded motorway meanderers? Driving simply doesn't get any less appealing.

But I've got a Mini Cooper S to play with, so I've spent the morning planning a nice, twisty route that runs parallel to the M25 and M40 and freeing up my diary so I can spend an extra hour on the road. If the standard Cooper C that I've just swapped out of was engaging enough to incentivise spontaneous Sunday morning drives, this more potent model is looking likely to double my monthly outgoings in

SECOND OPINION

I loved running a Mini Cooper S Convertible a few years ago. It was just great fun, and this hatchback serves up the same dynamic enjoyment – no surprise when the mechanicals haven't really been changed. Instead, Mini focused on giving the interior more of a modern appeal – but ruined it with that ridiculous dinner-plate touchscreen. Oh, and you can't have a manual gearbox any more? I would be heading to Auto Trader... **KC** unnecessarily spent hydrocarbons.

Already, even after just a couple of spirited blasts, it's proving to be among the least compromised 'fun cars' I've daily-driven – which is to say it's punchy and engaging without being unduly uncomfortable or catastrophically thirsty. It's incentivising without being intimidating.

I will give a more nuanced account of its dynamic character once I've fully got under its skin, but suffice to say, for now, that the age-old formula of cramming 200bhp-plus of whooshing turbo grunt into the shell of a school-running, supermarket-bothering hatchback is one that holds enduring appeal.

I was pleased to discover that the differences between C and S are immediately obvious enough to sell this as far more than a gratuitous badging exercise. The range-topper looks mean, goes fast, steers sweetly and has all those angry red interior trimmings that you have to have in a performance car these days.

Arguably, though, beneath its heavily refreshed bodywork and dazzlingly digitised dashboard, this latest Cooper S is something of a dinosaur in 2025. Not in any real physical sense – the drivetrain still feels slick and the cabin doesn't really want for any technical odds and sods – but conceptually. With the likes of the Ford Fiesta ST and Hyundai i20 N consigned to the history books, the Cooper S has been left almost unsupported to stand and fight for the survival of the hot supermini. The Ford Puma ST is too tall and the Toyota GR Yaris far too hardcore to bear comparison, so I make the Volkswagen Polo GTI the only real alternative on the market today – but that's a comparative minnow in sales terms and is edging towards retirement.

Happily, green shoots of a genre renaissance are sprouting, thanks to EVs, with the Abarth 500e, Alpine A290 and Cooper SE suggesting that the appeal of a sporting supermini can survive the extinction of rorty little petrol engines.

Early details of the new Cupra Raval suggest it's being developed with a keen eye on dynamic prowess, too, and stone-hearted are they who don't feel at least a stir of anticipation at the promise of 'go-kart handling' from Volkswagen's first electric GTI car in 2026.

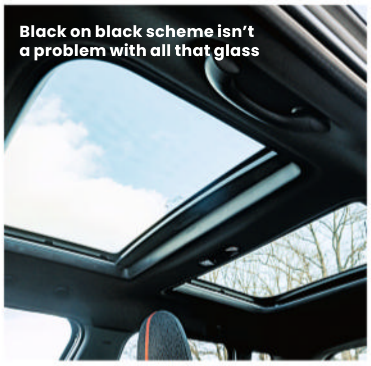
But these are fundamentally different beasts, which, despite the best efforts of their engineers, are inherently less mechanically charismatic and must be imbued with all manner of technical trickery to successfully emulate the emotive appeal of their forebears. They don't pop, fizz or grunt with the cheery loutishness of their forebears, and it's far more difficult to set them aside from the humble family runarounds on which they are based. Say what you like about my Cooper S's gratuitous John Cooper Works-flavoured bodykit, racing stripes and fruity exhaust note, but there's no mistaking it for a common-or-garden Cooper C.

And so I suppose I find myself writing something of a eulogy. The hot supermini is a type of car that has contributed more than its fair share of five-star road tests over the years, and of which you can trace the evolution back to such icons as the Peugeot 205 GTi and Renault 5 Turbo. Even if a brave new electric era awaits (and accounting for the fact that the petrol Cooper S will be on sale until the end of this decade at least), there is undeniably an undercurrent of poignancy to my stewardship of this old stager, and I plan to celebrate every minute of it.

Beginning right now, with an urgent trip to the supermarket. Maybe one a few towns over.

FELIX PAGE

"It's something of a dinosaur, left with only one direct rival"


Black on black scheme isn't a problem with all that glass

It's not a JCW but is badged and dressed as one. Go figure

TEST DATA

MINI COOPER S SPORT 5DR

Price new £32,070 **Price as tested** £34,620 **Options** Level 2 pack £2000, Legend Grey paint £550 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 43.5mpg (WLTP)

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SNAPSHOTS

GENESIS G80 EV

Mileage 14,144 **Last seen** 5.2.25
In the past few weeks I've used the G80 as a demonstrator of the joys of EVs, because it's still quite clear that many people in my circle - who I'd call well informed on other subjects – are woefully ignorant of them. I've done four local sorties and been rewarded in three cases by surprise and enthusiasm about the quietness, refinement and precise power. That trio decided to try demo EVs. The other remains a diesel devotee – and good luck to her – but 75% isn't a bad result. **SC**

SKODA SUPERB

Mileage 2057 **Last seen** 12.2.25
When last I wrote, I was trying to extract 800 miles out of a tank of diesel. Annoyingly, a series of short stop-start trips meant I fell about 30 miles shy before deciding on a confidence fill. Still a hugely impressive effort, though. Almost as impressive as this estate's boot space: a recent tip trip gave me the chance to fold the rear seats down and left me regretting that I hadn't sorted more junk to throw out. **JA**

MAZDA MX-5

Mileage 6086 **Last seen** 12.2.25
I'm not one of these sadists who insists on having the roof down as long as it isn't raining, but I am finding myself sans top more often than I thought I would, simply because of how quick and easy it is. Importantly, and unlike with the Mk1 MX-5 that I once owned, I can raise it back up with one arm. **MSc**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A RANGE ROVER EVOQUE

WHEN LAND ROVER WOWED FOLLOWERS OF FASHION

Fancy a stylish Evoque on the drive? Here's how to spend it like Beckham

If you want a compact SUV that looks great and makes you feel good when you drive it, the ultra-chic first-generation Range Rover Evoque is a hard car to overlook – and more so when you can pick one up for just £3000.

Indeed, the swish and swanky Evoque hit the ground running in 2011, with modern styling that was a faithful translation of the striking LRX concept unveiled at the Detroit motor show almost 20 years ago.

The Evoque racked up more than 800,000 sales worldwide before Jaguar Land Rover rolled out the second-generation model in 2018, and plenty of first-generation cars of varying age, mileage and price have filtered into the classifieds.

Fashion-focused buyers are likely to be tempted by this cut-price baby Range Rover. If you're looking for one at a bargain price, you will probably end up with a diesel, because they dominate used car buying sites. The 2.2-litre diesel was offered in two states of tune, but while the front-wheel-drive eD4 and four-wheel-drive TD4 produced only 147bhp, they're not as staid as you might expect compared with the 187bhp SD4, which came with four-wheel drive as standard.

The SD4 has a wider breadth of capabilities and is more competent both on the road and off it: that four-wheel drive might come in handy when you drop the kids off at a muddy football field, but for daily jaunts the eD4 is fine. Even with 40bhp more, the SD4 only feels much faster when overtaking or pressing on uphill, but at the same time it's about as economical

Interior is a real draw, with a plush, premium feel and generous tech

What we said then

13 JULY 2011

"Several of our testers fell for it completely; its showroom and visual appeal is second to none, and its dynamics are able enough to make it the premium compact SUV of choice. Rivals like the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Volkswagen Tiguan aren't as appealing and lack the same sense of occasion that the Range Rover imparts."

as the lower-powered eD4.

Waving the petrol flag is the 237bhp turbocharged four-pot Si4, which is smooth but rather thirsty. One of the oil-burners will serve you better if you're doing big miles.

Aim for a post-2014 Evoque, too, because then you will also get the benefit of the slicker and more economical ZF nine-speed automatic gearbox. It's smoother than the early six-speeder and, with its low first gear, it's far more sophisticated when you're towing or venturing off road.

Indeed, off-roading in an Evoque might feel a bit like running a Tough Mudder endurance race in a tuxedo, but don't let its suave looks deter you. It's fitted with Land Rover's familiar Terrain Response system, which has modes for mud, snow and ruts to help it perform far better than its rivals off the beaten track. Its approach and departure angles are impressive, too, and it can even wade through 500mm of water.

A facelift in 2015 brought styling and interior revisions, but the biggest change was the introduction of JLR's Ingenium engines. The 2.0-litre diesel unit, this time offered in 147bhp TD4 and 177bhp SD4 forms, was punchier, cleaner and more economical than its 2.2-litre predecessor but also far less reliable. Faulty diesel particulate filters can lead to oil dilution and engine damage, and the weak timing chain can lead to all manner of issues (see 'Buyer Beware', right). If you're taken by the post-2015 car's sharper looks, a petrol will serve you better: you can have a potent 285bhp version or the 237bhp Si4.

Predictably, the Evoque is upmarket-feeling inside. The trims are endless (confusing, too), so keep it simple and aim for a Pure Tech, which gets a neat 8.0in infotainment screen, cruise control and trailer assist. Pure Plus is pretty good value for money, with its powered tailgate, leather upholstery and 19in alloy wheels.

Later cars have a slightly bigger 10.2in screen, and from 2016 you could even buy a soft-top convertible version. Three-door Evoques look even more swish, but we would stick with the five-door for its roomier cabin and better visibility.

SAM PHILLIPS

Terrain Response system helps to bolster the Evoque's considerable off-road ability

"The 2.0-litre diesel engine was punchier, cleaner and more economical but far less reliable"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

DARREN MORGAN

"I've owned my 2015 2.2-litre Dynamic Lux for two years. The Evoque has been my dream car since it was launched, but the cost of ownership is ridiculous. In the past year, it has cost more than £4000, due to failure of the rear diff, rear camera, 360deg camera module and more. Insurance is expensive too: my policy was £1760 this year. The car itself is fantastic to drive, very comfortable and just at the right height on the road."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

If your 2.0 Ingenium diesel has a 'service required' dash warning and a potent smell of fuel from the engine, it suggests the diesel particulate filter is causing excessive fuel injection during regen cycles. It means diesel finds its way into the engine sump and dilutes the oil, which loses its protective properties and causes severe damage. Changing the engine oil more regularly lessens the chances of this occurring.

Timing chains can stretch, knock out the timing and cause engine damage. Some specialists upgrade the chain; if it hasn't been replaced or there's a rattle, walk away.

Ingenium diesels' turbos can fail. Whining, whistling, a loss of power or an engine management light are symptoms. Budget £1500-£2000 to replace.

Difficulty starting or a lack of power could spell issues with the high-pressure fuel pump. It can be fixed but may need to be replaced. Budget £500-£800.

A 'traction reduced' message on the dash could mean the Haldex oil pump is blocked. You will need £800-£1000 to replace it.

■ GEARBOX

Take a long test drive up to motorway speeds to feel for languid changes or clunkiness from the six-speed auto 'box.

If the nine-speed 'box thumps when you select drive, it could need a software update. Early nine-speeders can jump back into neutral and refuse to go back into gear. Turning the car off and on again can resolve it, but it should be checked.

A low battery can cause issues with the stop/start system.

■ BODY

Few Evoques head off road, but it's worth checking the underside, bumpers and wheels for scuffs.

The panoramic roof can crack. It's expensive to replace, so be sure to look out for any damage.

■ SUSPENSION

Listen out for noises from the suspension and feel for looseness or knocks via the steering wheel.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

Tax costs vary, but the 2.0 diesel eD4 SE incurs only £35 per year. A 2.2-litre diesel with the nine-speed 'box is £255 in comparison.

Several special-edition Evoques were sold in the UK. The Landmark edition celebrated six years of Evoque production, while the extravagant Special Edition got yellow trim and black paint.

There was also the VB model, designed by Victoria Beckham, but only five were sold in the UK.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£3000-£8999

Lots of early eD4, TD4 and SD4 diesels with big miles and many owners. Broad mix of trims. Odd car with full history. Few petrols.

£9000-£14,999

A few more petrols but mainly diesels. Mileage, trims and ages vary. More Ingenium diesels with plenty of tidy 2.2 nine-speeders.

£15,000-£20,999

Reasonable- to low-mileage full service history Ingenium diesels. Some cabrios.

£21,000 AND ABOVE

Newer, low-mileage examples in immaculate condition.

ONE WE FOUND

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE SD4 PURE TECH, 2015, 66,000 MILES, £11,295

This Pure Tech model has the earlier 2.2-litre diesel engine and nine-speed 'box. Only one previous owner, a full history and a long MOT. A recent service, too.

My car & I

Beloved Citroën is pièce de Résistance

For all its technical accomplishments – the first mass-produced car with a monocoque body, front-wheel drive, all-round independent suspension and rack and pinion steering – the Citroën Traction Avant will forever be associated with images of French Resistance fighters gunning down hated Gestapo officers at Parisian brasseries.

At least that is the image playing in my head when a Traction turns up at my local car meet and parks discreetly away from the BMWs and Porsches. From it steps a woman – hiding a Sten gun in the poacher's pocket of her long coat, perhaps? "Not today," says Philippa Field. "I've just come for the coffee."

Her Traction Avant is a lovely car. It's low-slung because of the absence of a separate chassis, and it has outsize front wings sporting a pair of round, chrome-rimmed headlights. Its distinctive radiator grille wears, appropriately, Normandy memorabilia. "I drove it to France for the 80th celebrations of the D-Day landings," explains Philippa. "I visited all the beaches and the car ran perfectly."

It's a left-hand-drive, Paris-built model dating from 1951 (there were also right-hand-drive versions called the Light 15, assembled in

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Our cars

Alpina excels on an Alpine adventure

BY ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

There's nothing faster than a diesel for travelling long distances, and the D3 proved that last week. Over an almost 1500-mile round trip to La Toussuire in the French Alps, it averaged 44mpg (with an average speed nudging 80mph). That meant that we only had to fill up twice, and we still got home with leftovers in the tank.

If you're the kind to do long journeys in one hit, there's no substitute for it, and it makes me wonder how much longer it would take in an electric car.

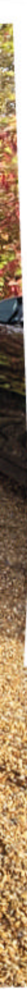
It's obviously feasible: on the French autoroutes, you will see plenty of British Teslas off on their ski trips, but how much longer did it take them than it took me? And before they had their electric car, did they do the journey in one hit, or have they always ambled down?

Mountain excitement: D3 was ace on long-haul trip to the French Alps

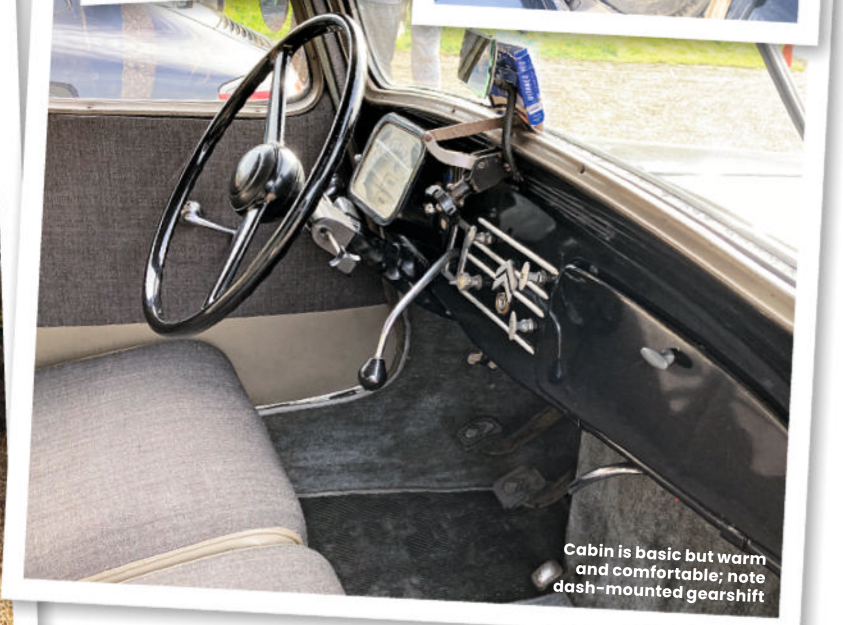
Beyond the economy and prodigious high-speed cruising ability, the D3 impressed the other three passengers with its low road noise and crisp sound system. It's hard to think of a car I'd rather do the trip in.

We were lucky, though, to encounter little snow on the roads, even high in the mountains, because that might have uncovered the weakness of rear-wheel drive and 265-section tyres. I doubt even snow socks would have been able to help us out.

Limited snow cover meant D3's rear-wheel traction wasn't an issue



Traction Avant was ahead of its time and its 1.9-litre four was a powerhouse



Cabin is basic but warm and comfortable; note dash-mounted gearshift

> **“It’s comfortable and the steering and brakes are good. Those things matter more than outright speed”**

Slough). Philippa’s husband, sadly no longer with us, bought it from a doctor in Lytham St Annes in 2006. “He had wanted a Traction Avant since seeing one parked on his street in London when he was a boy,” says Philippa. Prior to Lytham St Annes, the car had been in Provence, which, with apologies to residents of England’s north-west coastal resort, sounds a lot better.

The Traction Avant’s front doors are hinged at the rear. Philippa opens the one on the passenger’s side to show me the interior, with the gearstick mounted out of the way on the dashboard (it operates a three-speed gearbox). With its few features and bits of shiny black plastic and dull alloys, the controls and dashboard are reminiscent of that other Citroën classic, the 2CV.

“I love it,” Philippa tells me. “There are only essential controls, but they’re simple to operate and robust enough for everyday use. The interior is warm, too, which is strange because there’s no heater.”

The odometer is showing 80,000 kilometres, or 50,000 miles in English, which, surely, can’t be right. Philippa doesn’t know. She has the car serviced by renowned Traction specialist John Gillard, who is now based in Kent. “He reckons it’s one of the nicest on his books,” says Philippa. “He recently gave it a full going-over. It wasn’t cheap, but he’s the expert, so I just tell him to do what needs doing.”

Philippa drives her Traction on an almost daily basis. However, while it is, thanks to its monocoque construction, a relatively light car, its 1.9-litre petrol engine struggles to keep pace with modern traffic. “It’s slow but comfortable,” says Philippa. “The steering and brakes are good, too, and it always starts promptly. I’d argue those things matter more than outright speed, with so many cameras around. I trust it completely.”

That it was her husband’s old car is important, of course, but Philippa says she would sell the Citroën if the right thing came along – although it sounds like that right thing might be the rare Traction Avant convertible she once saw at Gillard’s workshop. “It was in burgundy and looked lovely,” she says.

It may have done, but when you’re out on patrol hunting Nazis, an inconspicuous black saloon is really what you want.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

SAM PHILLIPS

2000 PEUGEOT 306 GTi-6

VS

KRIS CULMER

1992 RENAULT TWINGO BENETTON

Brief: Find a modern French classic for no more than £6000

KC Nothing signals that you’re in France like the unfamiliar sight of a Mk1 Twingo – other than, perhaps, a local reacting to denting some dull box like your 307 in a Carrefour car park with an uninterested ‘ah, bof’.

SP They want a modern French classic, not a heap of mustard-hued misery. I’m sure you’ll argue it’s a French icon because it’s left-hand drive and mostly made of cheese. My 306 GTi-6 may be leggy, but it’s a proper hot hatch with bags of appeal for just £5250.

KC Misery? Why is Renault reviving it, then? As for the attack on yellow, I guess you don’t know how cool Benetton clothing was in the ’90s – and check out at its multicoloured seats! Plus, this fromage is rock-hard, because loads of vital bits have just been renewed, yet it still costs only £3285.

SP Those seats look like Elmer the Elephant, and no new parts will make a Twingo fun to drive. My 306 is subtle but superb and has aged like a fine wine. It’s had a thorough overhaul and has a new MOT.

KC Your souped-up 308 will make only its driver smile, whereas my Twingo will make everyone around it smile. It was a design icon from day one, whereas no one can even remember what a 309 looks like.

SP ‘Ah, bof.’

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

CITROEN C6 2.7 V6 LIGNAGE

2007, 100,000 miles, £5990

A luxurious and comfy saloon for less than £6k? This quirky C6 has covered some miles, but it’s only had two former keepers, one of them Citroën UK. Recent new suspension, brakes and wishbones, too, and a characterful V6 diesel.

CITROEN MY AMI TONIC

2022, 1200 miles, £5795

Nearly new electric cars don’t get much cheaper than this. Okay, calling the Ami a car is a stretch, but this quadricycle is ideal for those after a set of cheap, city-scything wheels. It has barely covered any miles and comes with a 12-month dealer warranty.

CITROEN SAXO 1.6 VTS

1997, 90,000 miles, £6495

The souped-up Saxo is a rare modern classic, with only 138 16-valve VTS cars registered on the road. It looks to be in fine condition, too, with a fresh service, lots of new parts (including new gearbox linkage) and plenty of service history.

CITROEN C4 CACTUS 1.2 PURETECH FEEL

2015, 64,000 miles, £5390

The bulbous, Airbump-panelled Cactus is roomy and comfy, and this one looks tidy enough. The purple may be a little funky, but with a full service, long MOT and lots of tech, it’s a fun family car.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

It took a brave soul to go into a desert in a 1920s car. No satellite phones, either

Going recklessly into the Sahara, 98 years ago

There has been lots of off-road activity in Autocar recently, which made me wonder: did people try to drive through the wilderness before 4x4 cars were invented? Well, of course they did, such is the human spirit. As far back as the early 1900s, even – but the story that captured my imagination came from 1927.

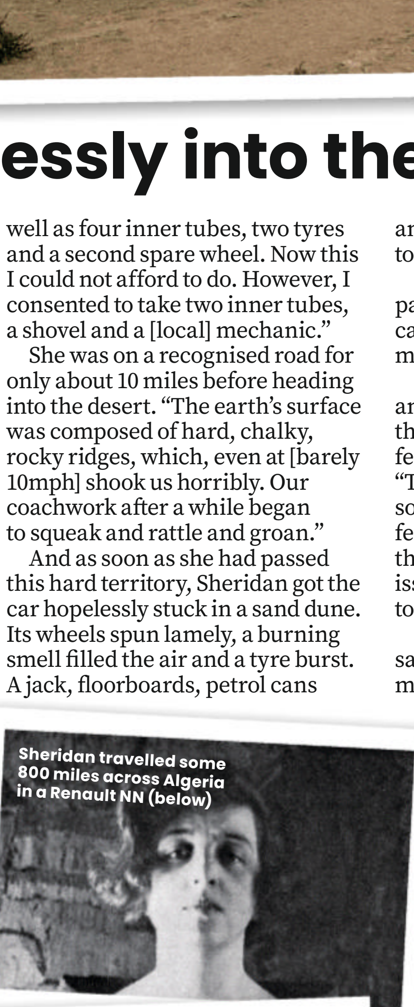
Imagine yourself as a British woman a century ago. Would you fancy driving a small, 15bhp Renault convertible across a large part of the Sahara desert inhabited by armed nomad groups, having no mechanical knowledge and no experience of driving on sand, with your two young children in tow? Obviously not – but you're not Winston Churchill's trouble-making, globetrotting, Soviet-seducing, writer and artist cousin.

Clare Sheridan reported in The Autocar: "I do not happen to be a motor tourist of the conventional kind, I dislike my species and love to get away from the tourist routes. The discomforts and the dangers of 'the track' rather add to my zest in motor adventuring. Indeed, for a person who is not likely to be able to afford a new car, I am rashly imprudent.

"The garages in Biskra smiled pityingly at me when I announced my intention of setting out [for Ourgla, 235 miles south]. Having realised, however, that I could not be dissuaded, they advised me to take every conceivable spare part, as well as four inner tubes, two tyres and a second spare wheel. Now this I could not afford to do. However, I consented to take two inner tubes, a shovel and a [local] mechanic."

She was on a recognised road for only about 10 miles before heading into the desert. "The earth's surface was composed of hard, chalky, rocky ridges, which, even at [barely 10mph] shook us horribly. Our coachwork after a while began to squeak and rattle and groan."

And as soon as she had passed this hard territory, Sheridan got the car hopelessly stuck in a sand dune. Its wheels spun lamely, a burning smell filled the air and a tyre burst. A jack, floorboards, petrol cans and collected scrub plants all failed to give traction.



Sheridan travelled some 800 miles across Algeria in a Renault NN (below)

Luckily, a caravan of camels passed nearby and the nomads came to Sheridan's aid. It took 17 men about an hour to free the car.

As the temperature plummeted, another tyre gave up – and so did the jack. As the mechanic fretted in feeble moonlight, Sheridan mused: "The Sahara at night is so lonely, so still, so vast, so unfriendly; one feels that one has no right to be there." Thankfully, he could fix the issues, and she just about got the car to crest the many dunes thereafter.

"I learnt a lot that night about sand: that you must not hesitate and must not be slow but look ahead and get into second in plenty of time and accelerate full."

At Touggourt, Sheridan was introduced to a local kaid ('commander'), who explained that his sports Peugeot had the benefits of an engine encased in a metal lid to keep out the sand and smaller wheels with 'balloon tyres' for better grip on it.

From here she proceeded the 60 miles to the kaid's house at Hadjira and, following a night's generous hospitality, another 120 miles to Ourgla.

"The track was so wide that it hardly mattered where one drove so long as one continued in the right direction. At one moment I took both my hands off the wheel, waved them wildly in the air, and accelerated as hard as I could. It was so childish, and such fun."

After a night at Ourgla, Sheridan's return to Touggourt was hampered by "detestable" headwinds – and her return to Biskra complicated by advice from her friend the kaid to not travel the way she had come but a "slightly longer but infinitely better" French military piste, marked out by iron posts.

"It was one of the most exciting and anxious bits of driving I have ever experienced. Success depended on speed, and if one hesitated, one was lost. After 20 miles or more of this agony, we found ourselves on an excellent track, but at midday we stopped, not so much to eat as to do something to the [leather cone] clutch, which was slipping badly. The rest of the journey I look back upon as a most ghastly nightmare of monotony."

It transpired the military required drivers to register and have their cars examined before using this piste, then go with a guide. "Had we broken down, we would have been left to perish," reflected Sheridan, "for we had no reserve of food or water and no one expected us."

It's a fine line between bravery and madness, so they say…

KRIS CULMER

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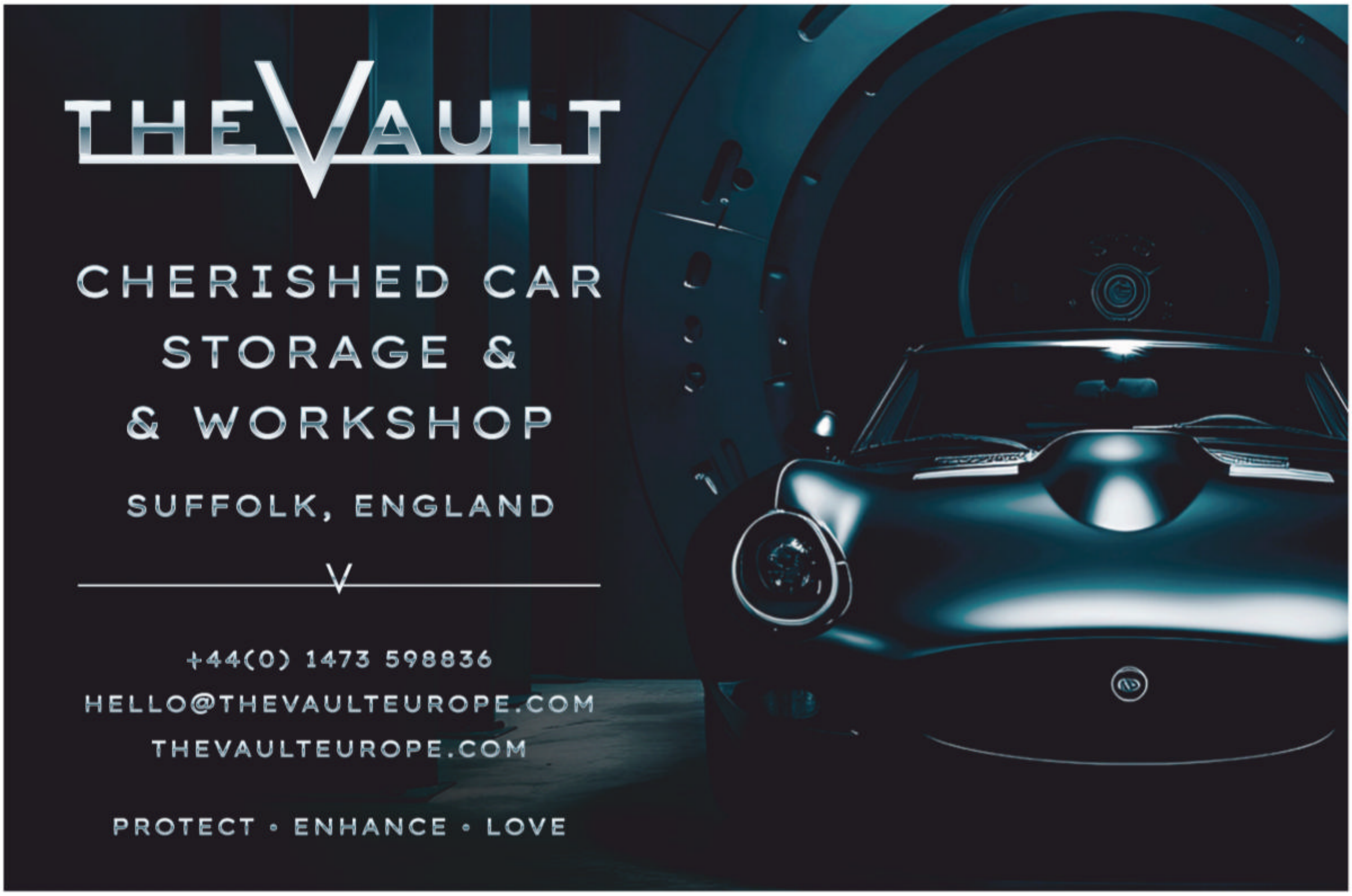

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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of the independent, objective and empirical road testing of new cars is the longest in the world. But like everything that endures, our road testing process has always moved with the times.

Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car - and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into their findings and learn more about more than a century of road tests with a subscription to the ever-expanding digital Autocar Archive (visit themagazineshop.com/aca23ed/aca).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
DBX ★★★★⯪ 28.10.20 Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.	4.6	3.8	2328	24.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆ 14.2.18 A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S4 TDI ★★★★☆ 18.9.19 Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.	4.6	4.1	1871	54.3	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★⯪☆ 8.3.17 Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.	5.7	5.3	1535	41.1	-
A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 14.11.18 High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.	8.4	7.5	1710	50.1	-
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 15.3.17 Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 21.6.17 Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 3.8.22 Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT W12 First Edition ★★★★⯪ 2.5.18 Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.	3.6	2.9	2295	26.4	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Flying Spur W12 ★★★★⯪ 15.7.20 Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

BMW

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal. 31.12.24	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire. 8.4.20	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	A good coupé rather than a great sports car. 1.6.22	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones. 12.7.23	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights. 15.5.19	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match. 15.1.20	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series. 1.7.20	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks. 6.1.21	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one. 21.4.21	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics. 19.1.22	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match. 16.11.22	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration. 29.1.25	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons. 29.11.23	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon. 3.4.24	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW. 15.2.23	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale. 16.1.19	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT. 5.2.20	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT. 3.6.20	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW. 25.1.23	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect. 13.11.19	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board. 2.1.19	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV. 20.3.24	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M50i M Performance xDrive	★★★★☆	Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many. 9.9.20	4.8	3.9	2583	30.5	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined. 29.3.23	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★⯪	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise. 2.3.22	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth. 21.8.24	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats. 15.1.25	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks. 22.9.21	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech. 31.5.23	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware. 17.1.24	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise. 20.11.13	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability. 9.3.16	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price. 31.8.22	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon. 22.6.22	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right. 16.8.23	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities. 11.1.23	-	-	471	-	39
C3 Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting. 28.12.16	9.6	9.4	1050	62.3	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless. 7.3.18	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution. 26.5.21	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified. 3.5.23	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance. 13.2.19	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making. 28.9.22	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be. 6.7.22	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed. 9.10.24	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly. 8.9.21	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec. 27.7.22	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward. 23.1.19	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet. 3.2.21	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable. 5.2.25	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas. 28.4.21	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort	★★★★☆	Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality. 22.8.18	13.1	12.6	1286	42.2	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	Notably improved yet barely any pricier. 27.11.24	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it. 20.4.22	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DS

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish. 10.7.19	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top. 29.6.22	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class. 19.9.18	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate. 26.4.23	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper. 2.2.22	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent. 21.12.22	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great. 3.11.21	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Panda 1.2 Easy	★★★★⯪	Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime. 25.4.12	14.6	15.6	1020	49.1	-
Panda 4x4 Twinair	★★★★☆	A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm. 17.4.13	14.6	15.8	1195	44.2	-
500 1.4 Lounge	★★★★☆	Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style. 19.9.07	10.3	10.4	1065	42.8	-
500C 1.2 Pop	★★★★☆	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better. 5.8.09	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 13.0 1070 42.1 -

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 7.7 1365 - 142

600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 7.7 1587 - 173

FORD

Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium
★★★★⯪ 9.8.17
A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.
6.6 7.8 1218 48.2 -

Fiesta ST ★★★★⯪ 15.8.18
Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.
6.6 7.8 1218 48.2 -

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X
★★★★⯪ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium
★★★★⯪ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD
★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD
★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse
★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium
★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak
★★★★⯪ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

F-150 Lightning Platinum
★★★⯪☆ 17.5.23
Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.
4.5 3.7 3121 - 288

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater
★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM ORA

Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition
★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX
★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R GT ★★★★⯪ 25.10.17
Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.
5.7 7.1 1400 57.0 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style
★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium
★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect
★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE
★★★⯪☆ 13.9.17
Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.
9.5 9.7 1425 48.9 -

i30 N Performance ★★★⯪☆ 28.12.17
Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.
6.4 5.6 1478 43.1 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium
★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium
★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster
★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAGUAR

XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.15
Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.
7.6 6.7 1530 48.7 -

XF 2.0d 180PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪ 2.12.15
A more mature, better all-round prospect, with excellent dynamics.
9.4 9.0 1595 - -

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD
★★★⯪☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace 2.0d AWD R-Sport
★★★★☆ 11.5.16
By and large, and engine apart, this is the Jaguar SUV that we hoped it would be.
9.2 9.7 1775 - -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE
★★★★⯪ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type V8 S Convertible ★★★★☆ 12.6.13
As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.
4.0 3.4 1810 28.5 -

F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé
★★★★☆ 22.11.17
Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.
5.7 5.1 1640 43.6 -

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé
★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit
★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

TOP 3

BEST SUPERCARS

1 Porsche 911 S/T

2 Ferrari 296 GTB

3 Lamborghini Revuelto

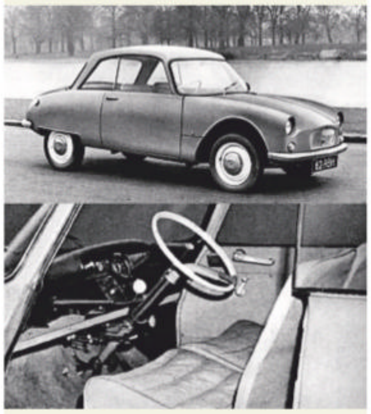
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1978 PONTIAC FIREBIRD TRANS AM

Based on a decade-old Chevy Camaro, this latest muscle car from GM features a massive V8 under a 'shaker hood' painted with a gold eagle, plus various spoilers and fins. "A car which brings out something of the small boy in every mature man."

Price £8014
Engine V8, 6609cc, petrol
Power 185bhp at 3600rpm
Torque 320lb ft at 2200rpm
Weight 1920kg
0-60mph 9.4sec
0-100mph 31.9sec
Top speed 119mph
Economy 15.2mpg



1961 CITROEN BIJOU

Citroën's Slough factory turns the iconic 2CV economy saloon into a pretty two-seat coupé with a new glassfibre body from the same pen as the Lotus Elite. "Offers an altogether different, leisurely style of motoring which some find very appealing."

Price £695
Engine 2 cyls horizontally opposed, 425cc, petrol
Power 12bhp at 4000rpm
Torque 17lb ft at 2500rpm
Weight 756kg
0-30mph 15.0sec
0-40mph 31.3sec
Top speed 50mph
Economy 49.2mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
LS 500h Premier	★★★☆☆	6.6.18	Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.	5.9	5.3	2404	42.2	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav
★★★★☆ 28.6.17
Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.
9.4 9.2 1620 53.9 -

CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★½☆ 10.5.23
Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.
7.6 7.2 1893 52.3 -

MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★½ 2.9.15
An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.
8.4 7.9 1050 - -

McLAREN

720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17
Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.
2.9 2.0 1419 24.2 -

750S ★★★★☆ 19.6.24
McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.
2.9 2.0 1412 28.8 -

Artura ★★★★½ 19.10.22
Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.
3.2 2.1 1552 32.9 17

Artura Spider ★★★★½ 6.11.24
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.
3.1 2.2 1618 27.2 17

GT ★★★½☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 2.3 1580 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 3.3 1661 41.5 -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate
★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 2.8 2217 27.1 7.1

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé
★★★★½ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 2.7 2135 30.1 -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé
★★★½☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 2.5 2339 23.9 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition
★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 2.8 2673 - 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition
★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 2.7 2666 26.1 -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 4.9 2471 29.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 2.8 1939 26.2 -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé
★★★½☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 2.7 1972 30.7 -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 Sport ★★★★☆ 4.7.18
Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.
8.7 7.9 1375 56.7 -

A200 AMG Line Executive
★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 7.3 1396 59.3 -

A250e AMG Line Premium
★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 5.4 1665 57.8 -

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 8.3 1405 51.3 -

CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 21.8.19
Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.
6.8 6.1 1555 48.3 -

C300e AMG Line ★★★★½ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 5.1 2005 49.0 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 5.9 1917 65.8 -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★½☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 5.5 2386 - 262

EQS 450 Business Class SUV
★★★½☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 5.2 2899 - 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 4.2 2530 37.0 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 7.6 2030 - 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 7.1 1810 55.4 -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 6.8 2235 - -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 6.0 1929 41.2 -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★½☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 6.0 2634 38.2 -

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 7.2 2451 31.3 -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 4.5 – 30.7 -

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 5.5 2122 37.1 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆ 12.6.24
Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 6.2 1311 47.9 -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 6.1 1692 - 185

5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★½☆ 25.11.20
MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.
8.0 7.1 1538 - 161

ZS EV Exclusive ★★★☆☆ 4.12.19
Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.
8.9 8.0 1556 - 113

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 6.6 1422 41.5 –

MINI

Countryman C Exclusive
★★★½☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 7.7 1618 46.9 -

Aceman SE Exclusive
★★★½☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 5.7 1756 3.1 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★½☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 4.3 1013 54.0 -

Plus Six ★★★★☆ 10.4.24
The individualist's sports car made better.
4.4 3.3 1188 37.2 -

Super 3 ★★★★½ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 5.9 644 43.5 -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 11.8 1256 46.0 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna
★★★★☆ 28.7.21
Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.
10.0 9.3 1412 44.9 -

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.
8.2 6.4 2109 - -

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna
★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 6.0 1947 33.8 -

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort
★★½☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 6.3 1474 38.2 -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium
★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV
- - 1455 38.2 -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 9.2 1358 55.3 -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 7.3 1746 42.1 40

TOP 3

BEST SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A110

2 Porsche 911

3 Mazda MX-5

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★⯪☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★⯪☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

TOP 3

BEST SMALL SUVs

1 Dacia Duster

2 Nissan Qashqai

3 Volvo XC40

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★⯪	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★⯪	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder	★★★★⯪	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★⯪	29.5.19	Faster, richer and more competent than the 991, if less vivacious.	3.4	2.8	1525	39.4	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★⯪	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★⯪	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★⯪	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★⯪	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★⯪☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	–	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★⯪	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★⯪☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★⯪	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★⯪	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
Mégane E-Tech Techno	★★★⯪☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★⯪☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★⯪☆	13.10.21	Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★⯪☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★⯪	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★⯪	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★⯪	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★⯪☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.6 TDI Ecomotive SE	★★★★⯪	19.10.16	Former class leader for all the right reasons – desirability included.	10.5	10.3	1408	-	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★⯪	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★⯪☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	–	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★⯪☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★⯪☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★⯪☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★⯪☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★⯪☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vitara 1.6 SZ5	★★★⯪☆	29.4.15	The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us.	9.5	9.5	1124	-	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4	★★★⯪☆	30.10.13	Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.	10.0	10.1	1305	67.5	-
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★⯪	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Lamborghini Temerario December
Huracán successor has new hybridised 4.0 V8 for 907bhp.

BMW M2 CS September
Track-focused version goes on crash diet, gets revised chassis.

Dacia Bigster March
Duster is stretched to Defender size yet still costs under £30k.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love... FRENCH MOTORWAYS

BY JONATHAN BRYCE

Our next-door neighbours, with their 7383 miles of smooth, free-flowing highway linking the outer reaches of their pretty countryside to the ring roads of their major towns, provide valuable lessons in inter-urban road transportation.

France's first motorway – or autoroute – was opened in 1941. Called the A13, it was the result of a two-decade-long study into the suitability of a 'highway to the west' connecting Paris with Normandy. The concept proved popular and the network ballooned in size, with toll roads springing up nationwide from the early 1960s.

The tolls are now ubiquitous. They're there because the system is owned by government-mandated private companies, and they're a large part of why I believe the network is in the main utterly serene.

Generally, motorway traffic volumes in France are insignificant compared with those in the UK, which means you're at a lower risk of having an accident, you arrive at your destination more refreshed and you have time to spare. The higher speed limit of 130kph (81mph) also helps.

Your journey will also be extremely smooth and almost completely devoid of potholes. Because French roads are more vigorously maintained, they're tangibly silkier and more relaxing to roll over. The UK's wetter climate combined with a less rigorous upkeep schedule means we don't stand a chance of competing. You notice the difference as soon as you arrive back in Dover, and that's before you hit the concrete bit of the M25 an hour later.

There is a price to pay for this – quite literally. If you want to go from Calais to Marseille and back and can't take advantage of the significant savings granted by a 'Liber-t' tag, you will end up paying a combined €85 (£71) in tolls. Again, though, the 662-mile journey will be much more pleasant and take you less time than an equivalent one would in the UK.

If you're completing a journey of that length, you're probably a tourist. Yet you need not be worried about getting lost: the naming and numbering of roads in France is very logical, as they sprout from Paris in a clockwise formation. Generally, numbers below 20 radiate from the capital, while higher numbers represent which region they belong to: the 30s on the eastern side, the 40s near the Alps, the 50s in the south-east, the 60s in the south, the 70s in the middle and the 80s out west.

Another thing: French road workers seem to do as much as they can to avoid disturbing the flow of traffic. Driving on the A28 in northern France recently, I noticed a maintenance team completing some work at the roadside. Instead of shutting the inside lane, they were trailed by an unmissable lorry with a large flashing yellow 'X' on its rear. Motorists simply moved over, drove past and got on with their days. A victory for common sense and efficiency.

Maybe I've just been stung by one too many aggravating long-distance journeys in the UK, or maybe my perspective is tainted by the fact I'm usually in happy holiday mode when I hit European Tarmac, but one thing is for sure: although there are far more 'péages' to contend with in France, driving on its motorway network takes far less of a toll.

parc zoologique CERZA

Ferraris are more at home in France, with its higher speed limit and pristine surfaces

> **"You arrive more refreshed and you have time to spare"**

Would you accept these in the UK in return for better motorways?

What we did this week

BEAR WITH THEM

The future has looked a little uncertain for Fiat in recent years. But following glowing reviews of the new Panda, hearing their big plans for new cars and taking a trip to the Centro Storico – housed in a gorgeous nouveau building where the company's first manufacturing workshops were set up – I'm feeling buoyant about it. **MURRAY SCULLION**

PROPER B-LISTER

One of my guilty pleasures is walking through posh areas and gawping at all the unobtainium on display – but I confess that I rather enjoy it when the most overtly attention-seeking metal is overlooked. I couldn't help wishing the owner of this Ferrari SF90 in Mayfair were there to see their car play the support act for the well-used MGB in front. **FELIX PAGE**

FRENCH FANCIES

The mid-route coffee stop on a recent launch was La Tour d'Enguerne, a country house hotel in the south of France. The owners clearly like their cars, because they had an eclectic mix of cool stuff on display in glass-fronted garages. I'll take the Alpine A310, please. **ILLYA VERPRAET**

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